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**Lone parents and welfare-to-work reform: A policy appraisal**

Haux, Tina

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# **Lone parents and welfare-to-work reform: A policy appraisal**

Tina Haux

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social & Policy Sciences

July 2009

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## Table of content:

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of tables.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of figures.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>List of abbreviations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Key terminology.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Research questions.....	13
1.2 Thesis outline.....	14
<b>CHAPTER 2: TIME FOR REFORM? The current welfare-to-work reform for lone parents.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Responsible citizen equals being in paid work.....	15
2.2 Analysing changes in the policy treatment of lone parents.....	17
2.3 The content and justifications for the reform.....	26
2.4 On Target: Child poverty and the employment rate of lone parents.....	32
2.5 Activation of lone parents based on the age of the youngest child.....	36
2.6 Summary.....	40
<b>CHAPTER 3: Lone parents not in work: a critical review of the research..</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 Ability to get a job - employability.....	42
3.2 Orientation to work.....	47
3.3 Scope of the review.....	52
3.4 The characteristics of lone parents not in work.....	57
3.5 Barriers to employment.....	58
3.6 Distance to work - measuring employability?.....	66
3.7 Summary of government sponsored research to date.....	74
<b>CHAPTER 4: Evidence-based policy appraisal.....</b>	<b>76</b>
4.1 Evidence-based-policy-making.....	76
4.2 Appraising policies according to the Green Book.....	80
4.3 Appraising the selection criterion for work activation of lone parents of the current welfare-to-work reform.....	83
4.4 Identifying alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation.....	86
4.5 Carrying out secondary analysis using the Families and Children Study...89	
4.8 Lone parenthood - a gendered issue?.....	95
4.9 Summary.....	95
<b>CHAPTER 5: Examining the likely success of activation policies based on the age of the youngest child.....</b>	<b>96</b>

5.1 Effect of different activation scenarios on the employment target .....	97
5.2 The steady-state employment rate as an indicator for future development of the employment rate .....	103
5.3 The characteristics of lone parents with older children who are not in work .....	106
5.4 Multiple barriers and the likely rate of employment entry .....	111
5.5 Activating lone parents with younger children.....	113
5.6 Summary .....	124
<b>CHAPTER 6: Alternative ways of selecting lone parents for work activation</b> .....	<b>126</b>
6.1 Transition into lone parenthood and to becoming the single provider.....	131
6.2 Selecting by employability .....	137
6.3 Activation based almost entirely on caseworker discretion .....	142
6.4 Voluntary model .....	147
6.5 Comparing the different selection models.....	149
<b>CHAPTER 7: Alternative policies for activating lone parents.....</b>	<b>153</b>
7.1 Targeting lone parents by their transition status.....	154
7.2 Targeting lone parents according to Wisconsin Works .....	159
7.3 Profiling distance to work for lone parents .....	164
7.4 Summary .....	169
<b>CHAPTER 8: Discussion and conclusions.....</b>	<b>172</b>
8.1 Discussion of key findings.....	172
8.2 Policy implications .....	180
8.3 Future directions for this research.....	181
8.5 Conclusion.....	182
<b>References.....</b>	<b>183</b>

## **Abstract**

The current welfare-to-work reform in Britain is activating lone parents with older children and marks a step-change in the treatment of lone parents. While there has been some support for using age of child as selection criterion for the activation of lone parents, it is not clear whether this equates to selecting by 'ability to work' if interpreted as ability to obtain a job.

The commitment of the current government to evidence-based-policy-making and the large amount of research available in this area form the justification for carrying out a policy appraisal of this aspect of the current welfare-to-work reform. The potential and likelihood to make substantial progress towards the lone parent employment and the child poverty target of the selection criteria will be assessed and compared to alternative approaches. Five selection models are identified in the international policy review: selection by age of child, transition status, employability or by caseworkers and finally, a voluntary model. The analysis is based on a critical discussion of the available evidence, an international policy review and secondary analysis of the Families and Children Study.

I argue that the current approach of selecting lone parents by the age of child is unlikely to result in substantial progress towards the lone parent employment target and instead likely to create a substantial group of long-term unemployed lone parents. Alternative approaches, such as using different selection criteria that take into account the employability of lone parents are more likely to make progress towards the employment and child poverty target.

## List of tables

Number	Title	Page
3.1	Reason for not looking for work – results from various surveys	60
3.2	Perceived barriers to work – results from various surveys	61
5.1:	Employment rate by age of child of all lone parents in 2005	95
5.2	Work status and age of child of all lone parents in 2005	96
5.3	Comparison of different activation scenarios of lone parents with older children	98
5.4	Reform potential by age of youngest child within target group of current reform (lone parents with older children)	99
5.5	Employment rates from 2002 to 2005 of all lone parents by age of child	101
5.6	Employment rates from 2002 to 2005 within target group of current reform (lone parents with older children)	102
5.7	Comparison of characteristics of lone parents with older children by their work status	105
5.8	Employability factors for lone parents with older children on IS	107
5.9	Number of disadvantages of lone parents with older children by work status	109
5.10	Employment rates of lone parents by age of youngest child	112
5.11	Work status of all lone parents by age of youngest child	112
5.12	Comparison of policy potential by age of chil	114
5.13	Employment rates by age of child from 2002 to 2005	115
5.14	Characteristics of lone parents with younger children by work status	117
5.15	Employability factors for lone parents with older children on IS	118
5.16	Number of disadvantages by work status for lone parents with younger children	119
5.17	Comparison of number of disadvantages between lone parents on Income Support with older and younger children	120
6.1	Six approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation	131
6.2	Employment rates and child poverty rates of lone parents in transition models	133
7.1	Work status of lone parents by transition status	147
7.2	Work status of all lone parents by transition	148
7.3	Comparison of different activation scenarios for ‘post-transition’	149

	group	
7.4	Number of disadvantages for lone parents in the 'post- transition' group by their work status	150
7.5	Applying Wisconsin Works criteria to lone parents on IS in Great Britain	153
7.6	The potential impact on the employment target of applying Wisconsin Works criteria	154
7.7	Number of disadvantages for lone parents according to W-2	155
7.8	Work anticipation of lone parents on IS	158
7.9	Comparison of different activation scenarios for 'looking and expecting to work' group	159
7.10	Comparison of characteristics of lone parents with older children by their work status	160
7.11	Number of disadvantages for lone parents by work anticipation	161
7.12	Comparison of employment rates, potential impact on the employment target and the number of disadvantages of the respective target groups	163

## List of figures

Number	Title	Page
2.1	The flexible New Deal	29
3.1	Main government sponsored surveys including lone parents	54
3.2	Government sponsored qualitative research studies with lone parents	55
3.3	Wording of question concerning reasons for not looking for work	59
3.4	Size of 'work postpone' group as part of overall sample in different surveys	69
3.5	Size of 'ever work' group	69
3.6	Question wording on distance from work	70
6.1	Wisconsin works placement ladder	131
6.2	Different policy models in practice	144

## List of abbreviations

CAPI	Computer-assisted-personal-interviewing
Cm	Command Paper
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EBPM	Evidence-based-policy-making
DSS	Department for Social Security (now Department for Work and Pensions)
FACS	Families and Children Study
HC	House of Commons
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
PRILIF	Programme of Research into Low Income Families
W2	Wisconsin Works
WFI	Work-focussed interviews



## Key terminology

<b>Activation</b>	Requiring individuals to be available for work, who had previously been eligible for income –replacement benefits
<b>Dependent child</b>	A child is defined as dependent by the government as long as it is eligible for Child Benefit, i.e. if it is either under 16 years of age or between 16 and 18 years old and in full-time education. For the sake of convenience, unless otherwise stated I will refer to lone parents with dependent children as lone parents.
<b>Employment</b>	Employment for the purposes of this study is defined as working one or more hours per week in line with the definition of the government’s employment target.
<b>Lone parent</b>	I am adopting the government’s definition of lone parenthood for this study, i.e. somebody who is mainly or solely responsible for the upbringing of at least one dependent child.
<b>Older children</b>	‘Older children’ in this context refers to lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years, i.e. the group targeted by the current welfare-to-work reform.
<b>Younger children</b>	Similarly, ‘younger children’ refers to lone parents whose youngest child is between three and six years old.
<b>Very young children</b>	Finally, lone parents having ‘very young children’ are defined as lone parents whose youngest child is between naught and two years old.
<b>Welfare-to-work reform</b>	The term current welfare-to-work reform in this thesis refers to the changes of the regulations of the 1948 National Assistance Act requiring lone parents claiming Income Support with older children to be available for work.
<b>Welfare Reform Bill</b>	This refers to the bill currently going through parliament, i.e. in early summer 2009, that seeks, among other things, to require lone parents on Income Support who have younger children to participate in work-related activity as a preparation to moving into work later on.

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Lone parents have featured prominently on the political agenda at various points over the past century (see among others Kiernan et al 1998, Smart 1996 and Lewis 1995), often constructed as forming an economic or a social problem or both (Kiernan et al 1998, Duncan and Edwards 1997 and Lewis 1995). The argument of lone parents as an economic problem is based on the size of this group, currently one in four families is headed by a lone parent (ONS 2009a, p. 15, table 2.2) and the relatively low employment rate of lone parents in Britain (OECD 2007). Linked to this is the question of whether the main source of financial support for lone parents should come from the other parent through maintenance payments, the government through social assistance payments or the lone parent themselves through labour market activity (see for example Lewis 1995 and Millar 1996a). The construction of lone parents as a social problem and, at times, a social threat has been on the basis of the following three dimensions in my view, namely as potentially jeopardising the institution of marriage, undermining the fabric of society and the welfare and outcomes of children (see Duncan and Edwards 1997, Roseneil and Mann 1996, Song 1996 and Lewis 1995 among others).

It has frequently been pointed out that lone parents were 'vilified' under the last Conservative governments and were presented as a prime example of the emerging underclass (Lister 2001a, Duncan and Edwards 1997, Roseneil and Mann 1996, Song 1996 and Lewis 1995 among others). In contrast, the subsequent New Labour governments have moved on from this approach, seeking to frame their social policies as a "new contract of welfare" based on rights and responsibilities of both the individual and government. While the notion of welfare dependency has persisted (Deacon 2002, Layard 1999 and Driver and Martell 1998) and paid work continues to be regarded as the best route out of poverty, the respective New Labour governments have framed their welfare reform policies within a 'new contract of welfare' according to which the state was regarded as having an enabling role (Lister 2002, Deacon 2002 among others). The policies introduced since 1997, such as the National Childcare Strategy and the New Deals, have been unprecedented in their scope and ambition (Millar 2006) even if they have not always fully worked in practice (Lister 2002). However, these measures have been firmly focused on the supply side with the aim of enhancing the employability of the individual (Evans 2001b and Peck and Theodore 2001) rather than attempting to manage the economy based on Keynesian principles (Layard 1999).

With regards to the design and improvement of their policy programme, New Labour promised to pay heed to 'what works', i.e to base their policies on evidence (Solesbury 2001 and Sanderson 2002). This focus on 'what works' resulted in numerous targets being set, against which policy progress was to be measured, and also in a big increase in policy evaluations being commissioned (see research review in chapter three). Arguably one of the boldest and most important targets set by the incoming Labour government was its promise to halve child poverty in 2010 and to abolish it by 2020 (in Blair 1999). Eradicating child poverty is regarded as important because of its 'impact ... on children's life chances and opportunities' (Millar and Ridge 2002; p. 245). Workless households were seen as a 'primary cause' of child poverty (Walker and Howard 2000) and became the 'key referent' for the government's welfare-to-work policy (Theodore 2007). Gregg and Wadsworth (2001) published a series of papers (1996, 1997 in 2001) highlighting the polarisation of work between households, i.e. an increase in both: households with several adults in employment and households with no adults in employment. The vast majority of workless households with children were headed by a lone parent (Gregg and Wadsworth 2001) and the poverty level of workless lone parent households was very high (Gregg and Wadsworth 2001). Thus, another target, this time for 70 per cent of all lone parents to be in employment by 2010, was set as one of the key policies through which to achieve the child poverty target.

The employment rate of lone parents has been low compared to that of mothers in couples in Britain and compared to that of lone parents in other countries (Bradshaw et al 2004 and OECD 2007). When the first New Labour government came to power in 1997, more than half of lone parents were drawing social assistance (Kiernan et al 1998). However, the employment rate of lone parents has gone up since 1997 from 47 per cent to 57 per cent in 2008 (ONS 2009a) and substantial progress has also been made towards reaching the child poverty target (Hirsch 2009). There is some debate as to what proportion of this progress can be attributed to policy changes, a change in the composition of lone parents in Britain and the overall economic climate that had been favourable until very recently (for a comparison of the available studies, see Gregg et al 2006). Notwithstanding, both of the above targets are likely to be missed if the present trends continue (for the most recent review of progress Hirsch 2009).

The prospect of both targets being missed, despite the unprecedented investment in policy infrastructure to support working parents (Millar 2006), together with the growth in the size, and therefore cost, of the inactive population in Britain are likely to have

played a key part in the decision to start activating a group of lone parents through the current welfare-to-work reform. This welfare-to-work reform, which is currently being implemented, requires lone parents with older children to be available for employment. From November 2008 lone parents whose youngest child is twelve have been moved from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance. From October 2009 this will apply to lone parents whose youngest child is ten years or over and from October 2010 will include all lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child is seven or over. The aim of this reform is to make significant progress towards the lone parent employment target and by extension the child poverty target (see White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* (Cm7290 2007) and Green Paper *No one writing off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility: Public Consultation* (Cm7363 2008)).

This reform is a milestone as it is the first time that compulsion to seek work for a group of lone parents has been introduced in Britain in the post war era. Effectively, the reform changes the regulations of the 1948 *National Assistance Act*, which stipulated that all lone parents were eligible for social assistance until their youngest child reached the age of 16. This reform has also been controversial. Some commentators are fundamentally questioning the activation of lone parents and argue that it does not sit well with the rhetoric regarding choice for parents in general and also does not necessarily accord with the focus on 'good' parenting (various contributions in HC42-I (2008/09)). Another set of arguments brought forward against the reform are that the infrastructure in terms of childcare provision and flexible working legislation is either not in place or not working sufficiently well (see representations in HC42-I (2008/09)). However, another group of commentators have argued for some time that the activation of lone parents with older children would soon be justified given the (since announced) levels of investment in childcare and making work pay by the respective Labour governments (Deacon 1999, see also Layard and Field quoted in Levitas 1999, more recently Freud 2007 and Stanley and Lohde 2004 and as early as the Commission for Social Justice Report 1994).

The argument for activating lone parents with older children seems compelling but it is not clear whether taking the age of the youngest child as the selection criterion for lone parents to be available for work will be successful in meeting the stated aims of the reform, given the composition of this group of lone parents (see Haux 2007). Age of child is often highlighted as one of several factors influencing non-employment of lone parents. Other factors refer to the labour market history of lone parents as well as their work orientation (see chapter three). Furthermore, Lister (2006) makes the broader

point that welfare reform is increasingly focussed on children at the expense of the welfare of parents. Finally, as Gregg et al (2006) have pointed out, the high employment rate of this group may indicate that those left on Income Support are perhaps not able to move into work easily.

The likely success of activation policies depends on a whole range of factors, not only on the question of who is being activated. Aspects such as how individuals are being activated and the local and national labour market contexts in which this activation is taking place are also important factors. However, both these aspects have been discussed extensively elsewhere (for example, HC42-I (2008/09)). In addition, the current welfare-to-work reform is not only being phased in during a recession but is also being implemented alongside a host of other reforms, such as the privatisation of the delivery of welfare administration and the introduction of the flexible New Deal. All of which makes it more difficult to estimate the impact of the selection criteria on the employment rate of lone parents. However, this does not mean that an important aspect of the policy design, such as the criterion for activation, cannot be evaluated in isolation on the basis of existing knowledge.

### ***1.1 Research questions***

The aim of this thesis therefore is to evaluate to what extent the age of the youngest child as the selection criterion for the activation of lone parents as applied in the current welfare-to-work reform can meet the objectives of the reform, namely to make progress towards the lone parent employment and child poverty targets. More specifically, my three research questions are as follows:

1. What is the evidence base on non-employment of lone parents and how useful is the evidence base for carrying out an evidence-based appraisal of the reform?
2. How well is the age of child selection criterion likely to work and for whom?
3. Are there alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation by the age of their youngest child and if so, how well would these work in the British context?

In order to try and answer the above questions, I am carrying out an evidence-based policy appraisal (HMTreasury 2003). This appraisal will be built upon:

- a critical review of the existing evidence,

- an international policy review to identify alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation and
- secondary analysis of data from the Families and Children Study to examine the target groups in the respective policy designs.

## **1.2 Thesis outline**

The outline of the PhD is as follows: In chapter two, the current welfare-to-work reform is being discussed in more detail with particular reference to the historical context of the policy treatment of lone parents in Britain, the wider agenda of the respective New Labour governments concerning rights and responsibilities and age of child as selection criterion for work activation. This is followed in chapter three by a critical review of the evidence base regarding the non-employment of lone parents, its causes and differentiation between lone parents in terms of their ability or willingness to move into the labour market. The existing evidence will be placed in the context of the two main theories aiming to explain non-employment of individuals, namely work orientation and employability. The aim of the chapter is to identify consensus and gaps and what this means for the appraisal of the current reform.

The methodology chapter, chapter four, discusses policy appraisal as a methodological approach in the context of evidence-based-policy-making before moving on to lay out how the appraisal of the selection approach has been operationalised in this thesis. In chapter five, the first set of results of the secondary analysis of the current welfare reform are presented. The focus in chapter five is on the age of child selection criterion and the analysis is based on two key aspects: firstly, the potential of this approach and, secondly, its likely success measured according to the counterfactual and the composition of the target group, including the distribution of levels of multiple disadvantages (Berthoud 2003a). In chapter six, four alternative approaches to the age of child activation criterion are identified on the basis of an international policy review. The four alternative approaches are referred to as transition, employability, caseworker and voluntary approach and will be illustrated using country case studies. The results of how the transition, employability and voluntary approaches would map onto the British context are discussed in chapter seven. Finally, chapter eight contains the discussion of the results of the policy appraisal exercise and places them in the broader context of existing welfare policies in Britain and evidence-based-policy-making more generally.

## CHAPTER 2: TIME FOR REFORM? The current welfare-to-work reform for lone parents

The activation of lone parents with older children marks a step-change in the policy treatment of lone parents in Britain as it limits the right to social assistance for lone parents for the first time since 1948. It reflects the focus of the respective New Labour governments of moving previously inactive groups into paid employment as the best route out of poverty and social exclusion. In this chapter the current welfare-to-work reform will be discussed with particular reference to the following five aspects:

- rights and responsibilities and New Labour (section 2.1),
- the historical context of the current reform (section 2.2),
- the content of and justifications for the reform (section 2.3),
- the child poverty and employment target (section 2.4) and
- activation based on the age of the youngest child (section 2.5).

### ***2.1 Responsible citizen equals being in paid work***

The statement “work for those who can and security for those who cannot”, in a document aptly titled ‘a new contract for welfare’ in the Green Paper *New ambitions for our country: a new contract for welfare* (Cm3805 (1998): iii), epitomises the focus of the respective New Labour governments on paid work. Much has been written about the role of paid work for the welfare reform programme of New Labour and there has largely been the consensus that paid work is regarded by New Labour not only as the best route out of poverty and social exclusion, but also as desirable in its own right for individuals, their dependents and society as a whole (Lewis 2001, Lister 2001a and Deacon 2002 among others):

‘The chance to work opens the chance to progress, to develop and to participate fully in society. We know that people in work are often healthier, and more fulfilled, than people who are not. It matters for society because the poverty linked to worklessness divides our communities and deprives too many children of a fair chance in life.’ (Green Paper *In work-better off: next steps to full employment* Cm7130 (2007): 5).



It is not entirely clear what led to paid work becoming the central plank of welfare reform for New Labour (Lewis 2002). Some people have argued that it is due to the pressures of globalisation on national competitiveness (Lewis 2003), while Deacon (2002) makes a detailed argument for the influence of American ideas on British social policy thinking. Others have argued that the link between worklessness and poverty has cemented the notion of paid work as the main reform option for New Labour. For example, Walker and Howard (2000) argue that the growth in workless households has been seen as the 'primary cause' of child poverty. A series of papers published by Gregg and Wadsworth (1996, 1997 and 2001, in 2001) highlight the polarisation of work between households over the past 20 years, i.e. the proportion of households with two or more earners increased as did the proportion of households with no earners. This polarisation has taken place despite overall unemployment levels having remained relatively stable over this period. While the unemployment rate has been low in Britain over the past ten years by historical and international standards, the size and cost of inactive groups such as disabled people and lone parents has grown substantially (Evans 2001a and Barbier 2001). The focus on workless households has meant that renewed attention is being paid to lone parents as the vast majority of workless households with children are headed by a lone parent (Gregg and Wadsworth 2001) and the poverty level of workless lone parent households are very high (Gregg and Wadsworth 2001). Finally, some commentators have pointed to the influence of research demonstrating the impact of adults moving into work on overall household income based on longitudinal analysis (Jenkins 1996 in Deacon 2002) in persuading the New Labour governments of the centrality of paid work to welfare reform.

In any event, paid work has become the key argument to convince the public that their money is well spent on welfare provision as it demanded particular behaviour from its recipients (Deacon 2002, Walker and Wiseman 2003 a and b). As Blair was keen on saying, welfare was to be a 'handup not a handout', and for handup one should read handup to move into employment to become a fully responsible and included citizen (Blair 1999).

More fundamentally, New Labour views parenting as a responsibility but not as (unpaid) work, which establishes a 'hierarchy of work', with unpaid work such as parenting and volunteering being placed below paid work and only paid work 'constituting real work and delivering real social inclusion' (Levitas 1999; 147).

Page (2003) argues that the emphasis on paid work is presenting three dilemmas for the Labour government, namely, that by raising employment as the main responsibility of citizens, all other contributions to society (such as care work) are devalued, that the emphasis on paid work in the market place means accepting inequalities both in terms of wages and job security but also in terms of being able to obtain a job and, finally, that the responsibility for finding a job is increasingly being shifted towards the individual. Furthermore, 'for those who cannot move into paid employment, New Labour offers little more than a continuation of benefit payments and frequent meetings with the Personal Advisor' (Page 2003; 7). Others have raised concerns that this group may be treated as second class citizens (Lewis 2003, Rake 2001 and Becker 2003). Moreover, Hewitt (2002; 85) has argued that in recent years, 'the definition of who cannot work has narrowed significantly'. With regards to lone parents, a number of authors have pointed out that the emphasis on paid work as the main responsibility of citizens also clashes with their responsibilities as parents which are increasingly enforced through parenting orders and courses, e.g. if a child is persistently truanting (Lewis 2003 among others).

## ***2.2 Analysing changes in the policy treatment of lone parents***

A number of analytical concepts have been applied to the comparison of the policy treatment of lone parents over time and between countries. Perhaps the more prominent concept is that of the mother/ worker dichotomy of whether lone parents are treated as mothers or workers<sup>1</sup>. This concept has been derived from the male breadwinner model (see original paper by Lewis and Ostner 1994 in Lewis 1997 and collections edited by Duncan and Edwards 1997 and Lewis 1997). Kilkey (2001) has taken this approach further by combining it with an analysis of financial outcomes suggesting that there are four groups: poor mothers, non-poor mothers, poor workers and non-poor workers.

Prior to 1997, the policy treatment of lone parents in Britain has been categorised variously as treating lone mothers as mothers (Lewis 1997), as poor mothers (Kilkey 2000) or as special group (Kamerman and Kahn 1988). Since New Labour has come to power, the policy situation for lone parents has changed substantially (Millar and Rowlingson 2001) and they have increasingly been treated as parents of future citizens rather than individuals with their own needs and aspirations (Lister 2006). Lewis (2006)

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<sup>1</sup> Millar (1996) suggests that a third category, namely that of 'wife', should be added.

has suggested that in light of a general trend towards an adult worker model, the correct question is no longer whether lone parents are treated as workers in different countries but when. In other words, while there is an international policy trend towards the activation of lone parents (OECD 2007, Carcillo and Grubb 2006), it tends to be focused on particular groups of lone parents rather than all lone parents.

As outlined briefly in the introduction, the current welfare-to-work reform is selecting lone parents on the basis of the age of their youngest child. In other words, there has been a policy shift from treating all lone parents in Britain as (poor) mothers (Lewis 1997 and Kilkey 2000) to treating a sub-group as workers, namely those with older children. How this shift has come about will be traced in this section. When describing the history of the policy development of lone parents in Britain, authors tend to identify five key periods<sup>2</sup>, namely the introduction of the New Poor Law (1834), the creation of the British welfare state post WWII, the re-discovery of poverty in the mid 1960s and linked to that the Finer Commission on One Parent Families, the Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 and finally, the New Labour governments since 1997 (the most detailed studies are Lewis 1995 and Kiernan et al 1998). These time points are also used here.

The current welfare reform is significant because it requires a group of lone parents to be available for work in return for social assistance for the first time in 60 years. It was stipulated in the National Assistance Act in 1948 that lone parents were eligible to receive social assistance until their youngest child reached the age of 16, irrespective of their marital status (see among others Lewis 1995). Historically, policies towards lone parents have differed according to the route into lone parenthood, i.e. whether they had become a lone parent as a result of bereavement, separation after marriage or whilst 'single'. Two detailed studies of the treatment of lone parents under the New Poor Law (1834) by Lees (2008) and Thane (1978) claim that the aim had been to distinguish between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. Widows tended to fall into the deserving category and usually received financial assistance, whilst separated mothers could be refused assistance for a year, in order not to encourage immorality (Lees 2008 and Thane 1978). Unmarried mothers tended to fare the worst and could be separated from some of their children and sent to the workhouse, unless they were able to support themselves (Lees 2008 and Thane 1978). The decision whether to grant financial assistance rested with the local assistance boards (Lees 2008 and

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<sup>2</sup> The number five applies only to publications post 1997, any publications prior to that period tend to refer to only four periods.

Thane 1978). Therefore, whether a lone parent was treated as a mother, (widowed) wife or worker (Millar 1996) depended on her marital status as well as the moral judgement of local assistance board members.

This distinction on the grounds of marital status continues to the present day. Only widows are included in the national insurance scheme devised by Beveridge while divorced, separated and single lone parents have to resort to social assistance (among others Kiernan et al 1998 and Lewis 1995)<sup>3</sup>. However, the importance of this distinction is much less apparent at a time when widows constitute a very small proportion of all lone parents (five per cent of all lone parents with dependent children in 2007 – Philo et al 2009, p. 24, table 2.2) and when all lone parents with dependent children are eligible for social assistance irrespective of their prior marital status.

As mentioned above, giving all lone parents access to social assistance was introduced as part of the National Assistance Act in 1948. The National Assistance Act was the last of the five main acts laying the foundations for the welfare state today (among others: Fraser 1983 and Timmins 1996). Its aim was 'to terminate the existing poor law and to provide in lieu thereof for the assistance of persons in need by the National Assistance Board and local authorities' (NAB 1948; 1093). In other words, it was intended as a safety net for those not covered by the newly expanded national insurance system. In his study of the history of the welfare state, Timmins (1996) argues that the main intended beneficiaries of the National Assistance Act were the elderly, the blind and those suffering from tuberculosis. For lone parents, having a right to social assistance regardless of personal circumstances, was a significant step compared to the New Poor Law<sup>4</sup>. As a result 'when the great social enactments of the post-war period came into operation, the position of the unmarried mother in society changed beyond recognition' (Ferguson and Fitzgerald 1954; 140). Ferguson and Fitzgerald in their study of social services during the war period have argued that 'it is one of the said consequences of the war that the government accepted new responsibility for the welfare of unmarried mothers and her babies' (1954; 138). The main arguments were that the rise in lone parenthood was the result of the high

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<sup>3</sup> Beveridge had originally intended to include the other groups of lone parents in the broader category at risk of poverty as a result of unmarried parenthood or separation, but could not fit them into his insurance framework (Lewis 1995).

<sup>4</sup> The New Poor Law, introduced in 1834, had used the workhouse test as a deterrent and distinguished between those 'deserving' of financial assistance and those 'undeserving' who had to go to the workhouse (Jones 1995 and Thane 1978). Notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' were often linked to perceived behaviour and morality and therefore were associated with the route into lone parenthood, as will be discussed further below. However, the administration, locally, remained relatively independent and provided relief for most of those in need (Fraser 1984 and Thane 1978).

number of casualties and the nature of the 'total war'<sup>5</sup> (Ferguson and Fitzgerald 1954)<sup>6</sup>. Thus, in the triangle of potential financial support for lone parents coming from the state, the non-resident parent or through the labour market activity of the lone parent (Lewis 1995 and Millar 1996b), the emphasis in Britain has been on the state for the past 60 years (Lewis 1995) and lone parents have thus been treated as 'mothers' in Britain in the post war period (Lewis 1995 and 1997).

Lone parents did not appear on the political agenda for the next couple of decades. This was to change with the publication of the study *The Poor and the Poorest* by Townsend and Abel-Smith in 1965, which drew attention to the high levels of poverty among children and older people, and led to the 're-discovery of poverty' in Britain. As a result, the political spotlight returned to the circumstances of families generally and lone parents in particular who were identified as one of the groups at risk of poverty in this study by Able-Smith and Townsend (1965). The Finer Commission, as it became known, was set up in 1969 specifically to investigate the circumstance of lone parents and how their situation could be ameliorated (Lewis 1995). By then family poverty, particularly of lone parents and large families, had become one of the 'leading issues of the decade' (Banting 1975). The Finer Commission came out neutral on whether lone parents should be in employment or not in its report (Lewis 1995 among others). However, it did suggest that 'the facts show that one parent families are, as a group, subject to special disadvantage which can to a worthwhile extent be remedied through a benefit (Guaranteed Maintenance Allowance) which is in the national interest to provide...' (*Report of the Committee on One-parent Families i and ii, The Finer report* Cmd5629 (1974):16). Such a Guaranteed Maintenance Allowance would have meant that the state pays maintenance to the resident parent while trying to recoup the money

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'total war' has been applied to the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW in particular where the war effort required the mobilisation of the population in Britain to aid the defence and production of items required for the war. With the majority of men absent in battle, this fell to those remaining (among others Fraser 1982). For many young women, this meant leaving their hometown to work in factories or hospitals elsewhere without the support and supervision of their families (Ferguson and Fitzgerald 1954). Furthermore, the families of those lone parents were less able to support them lone mothers, e.g. by sharing the family home, than they would be during peace time as a result of the bombing (Ferguson and Fitzgerald 1954).

<sup>6</sup> The assumption that lone parents with older children should be working while those with younger children should not have to, appears to have been a part of the way the National Assistance Act was administered at the local level. Local members of the NABs tended to encourage lone parents to register for employment, irrespective of the age of their child, although it was the case that 'the Board does not impose this requirement on persons who are over 65 years old (or over 60 years in the case of women), or who are sick or handicapped to a degree that makes them incapable of work, or who have domestic responsibilities such as the care of young children which makes it unreasonable to expect them to take full-time work, but in other cases it is normal' (NAB 1948; 7).

from the absent parent<sup>7</sup>. While the Guaranteed Maintenance Allowance was never introduced in Britain, the notion that lone parents had additional needs was incorporated into the design of the new Child Benefit introduced in 1975<sup>8</sup> (Kiernan et al 1998 and Lewis 1995).

The incoming Conservative government in 1979 did not perceive lone parents as a 'problem' initially, owing to the relatively small numbers and low level of expenditure taken up by this group (Land 1998a). Instead the policy focus was on the unemployed and, particularly, on the young unemployed (Land 1998a). Therefore, lone parents did not feature prominently in the first Social Security Reform in 1986, which contained a radical reform of unemployment benefits (Fraser 1982 and Lewis 1995). On the contrary, the Conservative government at the time introduced a lone parent top-up to Income Support in recognition of the additional financial pressures they faced (Kiernan et al. 1998)<sup>9</sup>. However, by the end of the 1980s, the size and cost in terms of public expenditure of this group had increased markedly, from ten per cent of all families with dependent children headed by a lone parent in 1979 to 18 per cent of all families in 1990, and in this vein expenditure on their benefits had doubled in real terms by the early 1990s (Land 1998a: 195) and tripled by the mid-1990s (Millar 2006). Increasingly, lone parents were included in the debates around welfare dependency, which had been imported from the New Right in the US (the key proponents of the dependency culture hypothesis were Murray (1984) in the US and Morgan (1985) and Meads (1986) in the UK - for a detailed discussion see Deacon 1997 and 2002). The political and public perception of lone parents changed during the 1990s as unemployed lone parents were 'vilified' by the media. Right wing politicians and social commentators in the early 1990 painted them as a 'social threat' (see Duncan and Edwards 1997, Mann and Roseneil 1996 and Lister 2002). Somewhat surprisingly, a government that had been so focussed on dismantling the welfare state and routing out the perceived dependency culture did not introduce any compulsion for lone parents to enter employment, though it ran a couple of pilot projects. Instead, the last Conservative

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<sup>7</sup> Proponents of Guaranteed Maintenance Payments argue that it would provide financial security for the lone parent families and would give the state a greater incentive to ensure maintenance was paid (Corden 1999).

<sup>8</sup> This benefit was a universal benefit payable for every child of all families but included an additional top-up for lone parent families thereby acknowledging that a relatively high proportion of lone parent families were living in poverty (Land 1998). In addition, lone parents were eligible to receive free milk for children under five and free school meals if they received Supplementary Benefit or the Family Income Supplement (Lewis 1995).

<sup>9</sup> In addition, a range of other measures were introduced from which lone parents benefited, such as: the increases to the maternity grant, child benefit rates and the personal tax allowance, as well as a tapered earnings disregard for lone parents on Supplementary Benefit (Land 1998a).

government abolished the right to priority treatment of lone parents in the allocation of council housing and was planning to stop the lone parent top-up on Income Support when it lost its mandate in 1997 (Lewis 2003).

The policies of the incoming Labour government towards lone parents were both an extension and a deviation from those of the previous Conservative government (Driver and Mardell 1998 and Deacon 2002). Soon after taking office in 1997, the incoming Labour government abolished the lone parent top-up elements in Income Support and Child Benefit, as had been planned by the last Conservative governments (Lister 2002). In its place additional money was channelled towards all children on benefits by increasing the child element of Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (Brewer 2007). However, whereas the respective Conservative governments had been neutral on whether lone parents should be in employment (Lewis 1995), New Labour conceptualised paid work as central to its proclaimed "new contract of welfare" (Green Paper *New ambitions for our country: A new contract for welfare* Cm3805 (1998) iii). Once again, the focus was on alleviating child poverty. However, while the policy response in the 1960s and 70s had been to provide additional financial support to lone parents<sup>10</sup>, the response since the late 1990s has been firmly centred on lone parents moving into work.

The announcement of the child poverty target in 1999 took some commentators by surprise (Walker 2001 and Lister 2002). Tony Blair announced in his Toynbee Hall Lecture in 1999 that his government would halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it altogether by 2020 (Blair 1999). The employment target for lone parents to bring the employment rate up to 70 per cent by 2010 was announced in the following year (for details see Millar 2003). The package of measures introduced by the respective New Labour governments to support lone parents moving into employment and supporting them financially in work is unparalleled in British social policy history, in terms of its reach, coherence and generosity (Millar 2006). The main policies with regards to lone parents and employment are the National Childcare Strategy, the New Deal for Lone Parents and the host of measures aiming to make work pay, such as the new tax credits and the benefit run-ons when lone parents move into work. A full description of their design and success of these policies can be found elsewhere (Brewer 2007 and Lewis 2007). A full discussion of these policies would go beyond the remit of this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> In the 1990s, a renewed effort was made to collect financial contributions from the non-resident parent.

I would argue that the overall direction of policies introduced in the first and second Labour terms was to encourage and enable rather than to compel lone parents into work. The main exception to this has been the introduction of compulsion to attend regular Work-Focussed Interviews. However, the main focus of the policy package mentioned above was on training, childcare provision, and making work pay through tax credits and benefit run-ons to smooth the transition into employment. One of the most frequently quoted statistic during the first two New Labour administrations was that nine out of ten lone parents want to work. That the voluntary nature of the New Deal for Lone Parents forms a crucial part of its success (Lewis et al 2000) has been quoted with the same frequency by opponents of further compulsion (for example in HC24-1 (2008)). Arguably, the spending that has been targeted at lone parents such as for the New Deal for Lone Parents was less than that for other groups (Evans 2001a), though lone parents have benefited from other policies to support 'hard working families' such as the National Childcare Strategy and tax credits. Whilst significant progress has been made towards both the child poverty and the employment target, it seems certain that neither target can be achieved with the current set of policies (Thurley 2003, Harker 2006 and HC24-1 (2008)). Therefore, the third administration is looking to shift the balance between rights and responsibilities of lone parents.

The past three years have seen a flurry of proposals and reports on lone parents and activation, and welfare reform more generally. In 2006, the Department for Work and Pensions published a Green Paper on welfare reform *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work* (Cm6730 (2006)). It suggested that lone parents on Income Support who had older children (12 years and over) should participate in work-related activity in preparation for moving into work supported by a small payment from the government. This approach seems to mirror the Australian model which requires lone parents to become increasingly involved in training or work-related activities as their children get older (though one of the main differences is that lone parents in Britain would have received an additional payment, whereas in Australia the benefit of lone parents is cut if they do not take part). Moreover, it assumes that lone parents in this group may have been out of work for some time and that an initial training or work-related activity phase may help towards increasing their skills as well as giving themselves, and the children involved, time to adjust to a change in circumstance which could mean using formal childcare.

However, that Green Paper was overtaken by events, namely, the commissioning of a review of the benefits system as a whole. The review, led by a former banker David



Freud, has become known as the Freud Review (Freud 2007). It contained the recommendation, among others, that lone parents with older children should be moving into work on the basis that other mothers worked, that the infrastructure to make work feasible and pay was in place and that work, as such, was good for all involved. In principle, the notion that lone parents with older children can be activated has been shared by a range of commentators (Deacon 1999, Toynbee 1999, see also Layard and Field quoted in Levitas 1998 and the Commission for Social Justice Report 1994).

The suggestion regarding the activation of lone parents with older children was taken forward in the next Green Paper on welfare reform: *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility: Public consultation* (Cm 7363 (2008)). It included the suggestion that lone parents whose youngest child is 12 or older should be available for work from October 2008 onwards, and from 2010 those whose youngest child is seven or older. In other words, the reform that is currently being implemented. The age cut off had been placed in the regulations of the National Assistance Act rather than the Act itself. This means that the regulations could be amended to implement the current reform without the consent of parliament.

The Freud report (2007) also contained two other reform suggestions, both of which are being taken forward alongside the increased activation of lone parents. These suggestions were: to privatise the running of JobCentres and to simplify the benefit system. The proposal to introduce work-related-activity payments seemed to have been dropped. Instead the focus was now on activation. The current welfare reform was implemented, requiring lone parents with older children to be available for work. At the same time, more ambitious plans for reform were put out to consultation in the Green Paper *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility: Public consultation* (Cm 7363 (2008)) mentioned above. The main suggestions in the Green Paper were to provide a more personalised service to jobseekers, to generally increase the levels of activation, to deliver a simplified system of two working age benefits and to strengthen the role of local partnerships between the JobCentre and private or voluntary back-to-work agencies. More specifically, with regards to lone parents it contained proposals to carry out skills checks once the youngest child reaches the age of five, potentially followed by mandatory attendance of training courses. It was followed by the White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* (Cm7506 (2008)), the same month as the publication of the Gregg report, both of which form the basis for the Welfare Reform Bill (DWP 2009).

The White Paper suggested rolling out the skills health check to lone parents with younger children and proposed the introduction of work-related activities. The main changes proposed in the Welfare Reform Bill can be traced back to the reports just mentioned. Gregg (2008) argued that only lone parents whose youngest child is one year old or younger should be exempt from work. Instead, lone parents should be profiled and divided into three categories according to their distance to work with the support and activity requirements differing accordingly. The Welfare Reform Bill is suggesting to pilot this model of 'personalised conditionality' as well as skills health checks for lone parents and even work-related activity requirements for lone parents whose youngest child is between three and six years old, mirroring the Australian approach of increasing the activity requirements according to the age of child (OECD 2007). Other elements of the Welfare Reform Bill are the controversial introduction of 'work for your benefit', frequently referred to as workfare by its critics, the abolition of Income Support, further requirements for recipients of the Employment and Support Allowance (formerly Incapacity Benefit), new sanctions, work-focussed interviews for people over 60, the requirement for partners of JSA (Jobseeker's Allowance) claimants to look for work and piloting lowering the tax credit hours requirement for lone parents from 16 hours per week to eight hours (DWP 2009). I have argued earlier that the current welfare-to-work reform marks a step change in the policy treatment of lone parents. The suggestions in the Welfare Reform Bill point in the same direction, namely the activation of particular groups, but are more far-reaching. However, it remains to be seen to what extent these proposed changes will be implemented given that the next election will need to take place between now and May 2010.

Hence, after more than ten years in office, the current government has introduced a welfare-to-work reform, which requires lone parents with older children to be available for work, thus changing the regulations of the National Assistance Act for the first time since 1948. Prior to November 2008, lone parents were eligible for Income Support until their youngest child reached the age of 16, i.e. they were not required to actively seek and be available for work until then. The age limit for children in the Income Support regulations was high by international standards. In many countries the eligibility for social assistance ends when the child is much younger or is generally time-limited (see Bradshaw et al 2002 and OECD 2007). As mentioned above, paid work for lone parents came to be seen as the best route out of poverty for their children. Yet the reform is at the same time only an interim step, with the Welfare Reform Bill going through parliament proposing more far reaching reforms. The focus seems to have shifted from activating some clearly defined groups towards moving

almost everyone, certainly the vast majority of lone parents, towards activation based on an assessment of their skills, which may lead to mandatory training or work-related-activity. The proposed 'work for your benefit' element emphasises that income replacement benefits would no longer mean being exempt from having to look for work or, at least, to carry out work-related-activities, in order to continue receiving said benefits.

There are a number of recurring themes in the debates around lone parenthood such as the issue of equity between lone-parent families and poor couple families, whether growing up in a lone parent family leads to poorer child outcomes, how to treat unmarried lone parenthood (either single lone parents or former cohabitantes) in terms of social security provision and how to establish whether separations are genuine (for example, Kiernan et al 1998). Lewis argues that the shifts in attitudes and policies are difficult to explain as they not linear and were often 'approached narrowly in terms of particular contemporary concerns, whether motherhood in the early century, poverty in the years before and after the Finer Report, and public expenditure costs in the late 1980s and 1990s' (1995:47).

'However, normative assumptions regarding family structure are now becoming less important in European countries. Under the new welfare ideology the key normative assumption is that all adults should be in the labour market even if this means precarious employment'  
(Lewis and Guillari 2005).

The following section will examine the content and justifications of the forthcoming reform and will touch on some of the implications for lone parents.

### **2.3 The content and justifications for the reform**

Lone parents with older children will be automatically deemed 'able to work' unless at least one child receives disability related benefits (White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* Cm 7290 (2007)) and thus moved from IS to JSA. Effectively this results in lone parents being treated almost like other jobseekers who do not have sole caring responsibilities, rather than providing a tailored service for lone parents such as the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). For example, personal advisors working on the NDLP have been receiving additional training on issues

affecting lone parents. The rules and requirements of JSA are based on adults without caring responsibilities and although additional guidance has been introduced to accommodate the new client group (White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* Cm 7290 (2007)) concerns have been voiced as to whether JSA will prove sufficiently flexible to deal with this new client group (HC42-1 2008). Having said that, JSA claimants with caring responsibilities will be allowed to limit the number of hours they are available to work to 16 hours per week, as long as this does not affect their chances of obtaining employment (CPAG 2008). In other words, unless there are particular circumstances, lone parents with older children currently on IS will be transferred over to JSA though some concessions have been made, e.g. lone parents will be able to look for part-time work only, shorter 'acceptable' travel to work times and consideration of childcare availability.

What difference will moving from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance make to lone parents with older children? When comparing the two benefits, it is striking that the actual rates and passported benefits are the same (see CPAG 2008). Therefore, lone parents moving from IS to JSA will not be worse off financially as such. In addition, lone parents on JSA retain the option of joining the New Deal for Lone Parents (White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* Cm 7290 (2007)). However, there are a number of differences between the two benefits mainly around jobsearching and availability requirements. Currently, the requirements for lone parents with older children on IS are to attend quarterly work focussed interviews. By contrast, the conditions for receiving benefits are substantially higher for those receiving Jobseeker's Allowance, in that JSA claimants have to:

- sign on every two weeks,
- make a jobseekers agreement with a personal advisor setting out steps for moving into employment,
- be 'actively looking for work', which in the documentation is explained as having to do at least three activities per fortnight, such as working on a CV or speaking to a potential employer and
- be able to start work straightaway, which means for example not being enrolled in training that could not pull out of immediately.

(all in CPAG 2008).

Sanctions on JSA differ in terms of the amount and duration of the benefit cut from the Income Support sanctioning regime. Furthermore, due to the greater activity requirements, there are more possibilities for incurring sanctions on JSA than on IS.

Not attending a work-focussed interview, required as part of an Income Support claim, without 'good cause'<sup>11</sup> can lead to a sanction of 20 per cent of Income Support, which usually remains in place until the lone parent attends a work-focussed interview meeting (CPAG 2008). In addition, not carrying out activities set out in personal agreements can lead to a two week full withdrawal of JSA, or if another sanction has been incurred in the previous 12 months, to a four week withdrawal of JSA. Regarding other reasons for sanctions, such as not taking up a job or voluntarily leaving a job without 'good cause'<sup>12</sup>, the period of benefit sanctioning (again for the full JSA award) can vary from one week to 26 weeks (all in CPAG 2008). Currently just under five per cent of lone parents required to attend work-focussed interviews have been subject to sanctioning on IS (Goodwin 2007). The reasons for these penalties being imposed appear to be based around caring responsibilities, rather than outright refusals (Goodwin 2007). It is not clear how the change in compliance requirements will affect the number of lone parents being subject to sanctions when moving onto JSA. However, given that the sanctions are going to be increased in number and duration, it would appear reasonable to expect that the proportion of lone parents who will be suffering from financial hardship will increase as they are moved onto JSA.

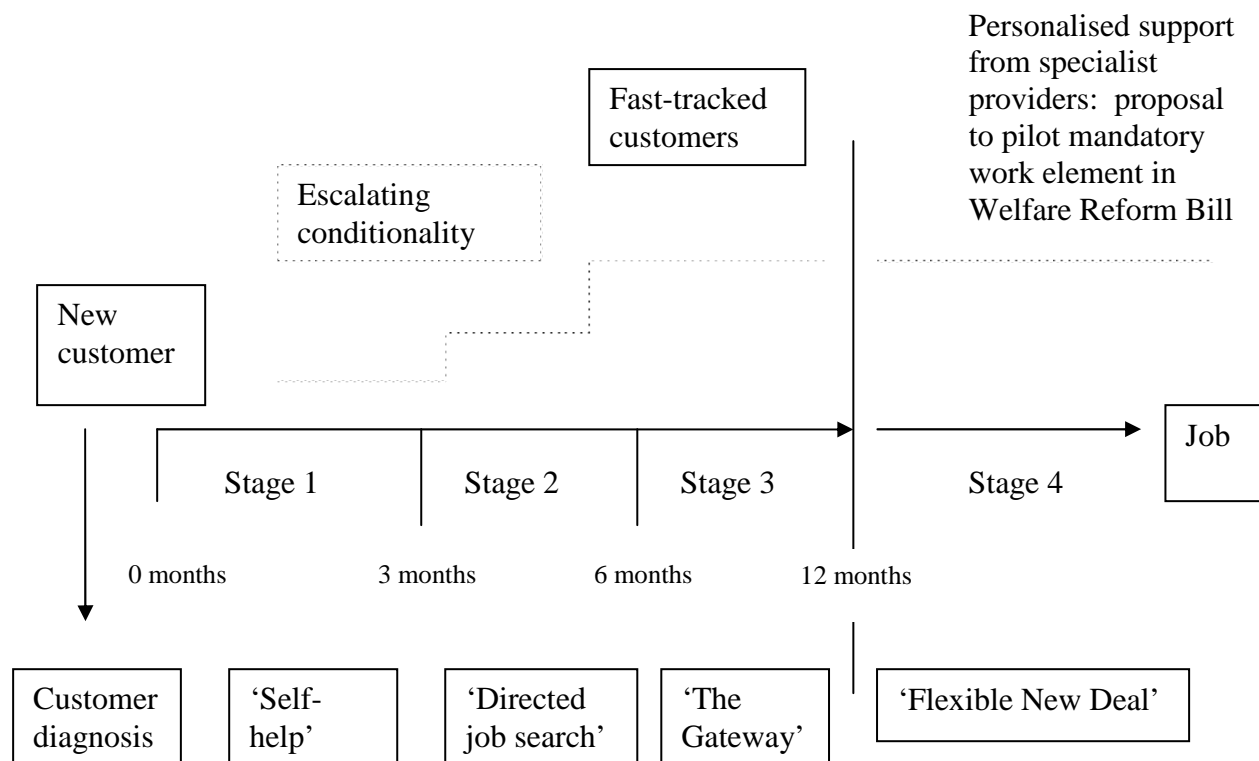
A more general change to JSA which is being implemented in stages from 2009 onwards, will affect lone parents coming on to the benefit, namely the flexible New Deal. This plans to give more tailored support to jobseekers, through providing the option of an initial skills health check. The changes to JSA mean that JSA claimants will go through into five stages with increasing activity, support and conditionality (see figure 1 below - White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* Cm7506 (2008)).

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<sup>11</sup> A 'good cause' in this context refers to a lone parent having a good reason for not attending and communicating this to the JobCentre within five days. A good cause can include: the lone parent did not understand the written notice of the appointment or he/she had an appointment, for example, with the dentist or a GP for herself or a child that could not be changed, if it was impossible to get there in terms of transport, if there was a religious reason, the funeral of a friend or family member or something similar.

<sup>12</sup> A 'good cause' in JSA is where somebody did not apply for a job as they did not want to be a strike breaker where it is within their agreement to stick to certain occupational categories for the first six months if it falls outside hours requirement or if a person fails to take up a vacancy when they are either still in full-time training (though they may have to leave that training course if offered a job) or four weeks after the end the course (CPAG 2008).

**Figure 2.1: The flexible New Deal**



(see appendix A in White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* Cm7290 (2007))

The Welfare Reform Bill contains the proposal to pilot work placements for phase four, i.e. the Gateway period of the flexible New Deal (Welfare Reform Bill 2009 and White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* Cm7506 (2008)). Clients with low skills and high levels of barriers to work can be fast-tracked to the Gateway period (Welfare Reform Bill and White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* Cm7506 (2008)). As the analysis in chapter five will show, this is likely to apply to a substantial proportion of lone parents. Therefore, there is likely to be a group of lone parents who will move into the Gateway phase straightaway with stronger conditionality and on to the private provider with the possibility of a four week, full-time work placement after six months if they have not found a job by then.

Therefore, the parenting responsibility of lone parents with older children is acknowledged in the reform in that lone parents do not have to look for full-time work as long as looking for part-time work does not impede their chances of obtaining employment. Furthermore, there are special rules for lone parents around childcare availability and travel to work time. However, beyond that they are treated like other groups of workers in terms of the required activities and penalties for non-compliance.

The government has argued that it is appropriate to expect lone parents with older children to look for work because:

- working will have beneficial effects for lone parents and their families,
- the infrastructure, in terms of helping lone parents into work, making work pay and the availability of suitable childcare is already in place or will be by 2010,
- most other countries have greater conditionality already,
- the employment rate of lone mothers is much higher in other countries, partly as a result of welfare reforms and
- a higher proportion of mothers in couples in this country are working as are a higher proportion of lone parents in other countries.

(White Paper *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* Cm7290 (2007)).

However, the reform is controversial for three main reasons. Firstly, questions have been raised as to whether the infrastructure to support lone parents in work is in place and operating well. Secondly, there is some disagreement with the argument put forward by the government that being in a major recession is a good time to require people to look for work. Instead, it could be argued that compulsory activation would

have had more chance of succeeding if introduced early on in the first term of office. The final main concern is based on analysis by Evans et al (2003), which suggests that one way to meet the employment target would be to focus on retention instead of activation. The employment target would be met if the employment retention rate of lone parents would drop to the national average for the working age population as a whole (Evans et al 2003).

The view that lone parents with older children should be in work and therefore no longer eligible for Income Support is, or has been, shared by the other political parties (see Menzies Campbell 2006 and Conservatives 2009). Looking at the policy suggestions of the Conservatives regarding lone parents and work activation, the differences between the main political parties are not immediately obvious. In both views, lone parents' ability to work, based on the age of the youngest child, is the central eligibility criterion rather than having care responsibilities per se, as has been the case until now. Moreover, in terms of delivery, the approach suggested by the Conservatives sounds familiar: privatisation of benefit administration, a flexible New Deal and sanctions for non-participation (Conservatives 2009). Deacon claims that there is a consensus that the IS regulations, which allow lone parents to claim benefits until their youngest child is 16, have contributed to the high level of worklessness among lone parents and that these people can therefore be required to 'accept a great responsibility to seek work and/or to enhance their employment skills' (1999, p. 77).

However, other commentators have indicated that a stepping up of conditionality is only acceptable once the right conditions are in place, which is currently not the case in their view (see among others HC24-1 2008 and Harker 2006), such as: suitable and affordable childcare, work-life balance policies and financial in-work support to ensure that moving into work does mean moving out of poverty. The concerns raised about the welfare-to-work reform have also included queries regarding whether the JSA regime will be flexible enough to accommodate the complex lives of lone parents (see HC24-1 2008). Doubts have been raised with regards to the availability of childcare generally and in particular in the devolved countries, at atypical hours and for disabled children (HC24-1 2008). Whilst the level of discretion for personal advisors has been increased as a result of bringing lone parents with older children onto JSA (see HC24-1 2008) this does not mean that it is always appropriately used. Avoiding sanctions requires a certain amount of understanding of the benefit rules and mechanisms which may be difficult for some lone parents who are struggling with basic skills or have English as their second language.



## ***2.4 On Target: Child poverty and the employment rate of lone parents***

As mentioned in the previous section, the respective New Labour governments moved from enabling lone parents into employment to requiring a group of lone parents to be available for work. One of the reasons for this change seems to have been that both the child poverty and the employment target are likely to be missed. In fact, progress towards both targets has slowed down in the past few years and it seemed therefore that a change in direction was required to improve both figures. This section will discuss the two targets in more detail both in terms of their definition and progress so far.

The aim of the reform, and arguably the strongest justification, is that the measures are being implemented in order to meet the child poverty target of halving it by 2010. Child poverty tripled under the Conservatives (Sutherland and Piachaud 2001), to the point where 35 per cent of children were living in households with an income below 50 per cent of the national average, after housing costs (Bradshaw 2001; p. 10). Moreover, child poverty rates were the highest in Europe and amongst the highest in the industrial world (Sutherland and Piachaud 2001 and Bradshaw 2001). The main causes for the increase in child poverty rates were the rise in the number of workless households and included within those, an increase in the number of lone parent households (Sutherland and Piachaud 2001). That is, in 1996, 69 per cent of children in workless households lived in a lone parent family (Gregg and Wadsworth 2001; p. 784).

The target to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it altogether by 2020, was arguably the central commitment of this Labour government regarding the income security of families (Walker 1999, Sutherland and Piachaud 2001 and Bradshaw 2001). Progress towards reaching the child poverty target is the subject of the annual Opportunity for All reports published by the government but also reviews carried out by independent organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (see Brewer et al 2008, Hirsch 2009 and Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2008). More recently, in 2007 a dedicated child poverty unit was created and is based in the Department for Children, Families and Schools.

The child poverty target is being used to shape government policy by the respective New Labour administrations and campaigners alike (for example, Fiminster 2001).

Tony Blair (1999) announced the child poverty targets at the Beveridge Lecture in Oxford in 1999, as part of his 'modern vision of welfare'. This was intended to rid welfare of the negative image it had acquired under the Conservatives where the scaling back of welfare provision had led to substantial increases in poverty, was open to fraud and had created poverty traps (Sutherland and Piachaud 2001 and Blair 1999). Instead, the focus on child poverty is based on the evidence of the long-term effects of poverty during childhood on the life chances of such children in terms of educational achievement, employment and income as well as health outcomes, encapsulated in the quote that 'being poor should not be a life sentence' (in Walker 1999; p.17).

Subsequent publications by the government have defined child poverty, as those households falling below 60 per cent of the median household income after housing costs, using the OECD equivalent scales (HM Treasury 2004 and DWP 2001). The child poverty review, however, has expanded on this definition and introduced the following three indicators:

1. 'Absolute low income – to measure whether the poorest families are seeing their incomes rise in real terms
2. Relative low income – to measure whether the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole
3. Material deprivation and relative low income combined – to provide a wider measure of people's living standards'

(HM Treasury 2004; 17).

In terms of the child poverty target, 'significant progress has been made ... with 600,000 fewer children living in poverty' (evidence presented by DWP to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, see HC42-1 2008). The first milestone, a reduction of child poverty by a quarter, was nearly met but progress has slowed since and the 2010 target is likely to be missed, unless the current improvements can be accelerated (Hirsch 2009). There appears to be some agreement that increasing the employment rate, both for couples and lone parents, is insufficient as a solution in itself (Hirsch with Millar 2006, Harker 2006 and HC42-1 2008). Instead, meeting the child poverty target requires a combination of welfare-to-work measures, as well as significant investment to upscale out of work benefits (Harker 2006 and Hirsch with Millar 2006). However, as the welfare reform demonstrates, moving a higher proportion of lone parent families into work remains a central tenet of the government's strategy to combat child poverty.

One year after the child poverty target was set, the government announced an employment target for lone parents with dependent children to rise to 70 per cent by 2010 (Millar 2006a). Being in work is defined as working one or more hours per week for the purposes of the employment target. However, in order to be eligible for tax credits, lone parents must be working at least 16 hours per week (CPAG 2008). The earnings disregard on IS, i.e. the amount lone parents can keep, is set at £20. Therefore, with the National Minimum Wage set at £5.73 (HMRC 2008) lone parents can only work for four hours even at the National Minimum Wage before the 100 per cent withdrawal rate kicks in. In other words, lone parents who are working but who are not working enough hours to move off IS, are included in the target. This seems to contradict the linked aim of meeting the child poverty target, i.e. that lone parents who are still very likely to be living in some level of poverty, are still being counted for the purposes of the employment target.

There is another apparent contradiction with regards to this reform. The current welfare-to-work reform is activating lone parents with older children. More precisely, lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 will have to be available for work by autumn 2010. However, lone parents whose youngest child is aged between 16 and 18 years and who is participating in full-time education, also count as lone parents with dependent children and therefore towards the employment rate. However, they are no longer eligible for IS. The purpose of the current welfare-to-work reform is to increase the employment rate of lone parents with older children. However, this small group of lone parents with children between 16 and 18 in full-time education are outside the remit of this reform as the lone parents are no longer eligible for IS and therefore not affected by the changes to the rules and eligibility criteria of IS.

The child poverty and lone parent employment targets are closely linked, as around 40 per cent of all children in relative poverty are living in lone parent families (*Delivering on child poverty: What would it take: A report to the Department of Work and Pensions*, Cm6915-i 2006; p.30) and reaching the 70 per cent employment target would lift another 200,000 children out of poverty (Freud 2007; 30)<sup>13</sup>. The announcement was arguably buoyed up by the early success of policies such as NDLP and tax credits, which increased the employment rate of lone parents from 46 per cent in 1997 to 51 per cent in 2001 (Millar 2003, p. 22). It is not clear how the actual figure of 70 per cent was arrived at. Millar (2003) has suggested that it is similar to the actual employment

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<sup>13</sup> This estimate is lower than that published in the Green Paper on welfare reform, wherein it is argued that reaching the lone parent employment target of 70 per cent by 2010 would lift another 300,000 children out of relative poverty (Cm6730 2006; p. 54).

rate of mothers in couples at the time the target was set (for example, Duffield 2002) and that it was close to the employment rate that would be achieved if all lone parents who claimed that they wanted to move into work, did so.

In a report (Thurley 2003) focussing on the employment target, a number of authors develop policy suggestions for meeting the employment target. Among the suggestions were

- to provide greater support for part-time employment,
- to introduce compulsion, e.g. to participate in NDLP,
- to include education and training the definition of 'being in employment',
- to assist women in gaining a secure foothold in the labour market and
- to target particular groups of lone parents for work activation.

(Millar 2003, Rafferty and Walker 2003, Evans 2003, all in Thurley 2003).

With regards to the last point, targeting lone parents is regarded to be both necessary in order to reduce deadweight costs but also poses challenges when it comes to identifying a particular group of lone parents for work activation, e.g. based on who would be likely to benefit the most (Rafferty and Walker 2003, Evans 2003, Berthoud 2003b all in Thurley 2003).

The employment rate of lone parents has increased by 12 per cent since 1997 and now stands at 57 per cent (Freud 2007; p. 30). Gregg et al. (2006; p. 41) have argued that the growth in the employment rate of lone parents of twelve per cent from 1995 to 2005 has been unprecedented and much higher than that for other groups, such as older workers (seven per cent), disabled workers (five per cent) and poor districts (five points). This increase has taken place in a time of economic growth, which is likely to have facilitated much of the increase (Millar and Ridge 2002 and Gregg et al 2006). In terms of the impact of policies, a review of a number of studies estimating the effect of the relevant policy package on the employment rate, has suggested that the increase attributed in these studies, with regards to the effect of these policies, is on average just under five per cent (Gregg et al 2006). Of those five per cent, four per cent are attributed to the package of financial support and one per cent to the compulsory WFI interviews. In other words, the major increase in the employment rate of lone parents can be attributed to economic circumstances and potentially the change in composition of lone parents, and only a small proportion seems to be down to the more generous financial support of work, through measures such as tax credits (Gregg et al 2007). Only one per cent of the employment increase has been attributed to the introduction of

compulsion, in the form of Work-Focussed-Interviews (Gregg et al 2006). However, the authors pointed out that it is difficult to separate the impact of different policies and that there may well be synergy effects between them (Gregg et al 2006). Modelling work by the IFS suggests that lone parents respond strongly to financial incentives and that a ten per cent increase in the financial rewards could lead to a two per cent increase in the employment rate. It has been argued that those lone parents who have moved into work were those able to do so fairly easily. The evidence suggests that the remaining non-employed caseload would be difficult to move into work, as experienced in the US (Gregg et al 2006), even more so in a weak economic climate.

Projecting forward, Berthoud (2003b) estimated that the employment rate of lone parents would increase to 62 per cent by 2010 and reach 70 per cent by 2015, if the increase seen between 1992 and 2000 in the employment rate of lone parents continued<sup>14</sup>. However, Harker estimated that an employment rate of 86 per cent of lone parents was needed, in order to reach the child poverty target (2006, p. 13)<sup>15</sup>. These figures disguise the fact that the employment rate of lone parents differs according to key characteristics, such as the age of the youngest child or the level of educational qualifications (see Gregg et al 2006). Taking the former as an example, the employment rate of lone parents increases with the age of their youngest child and the employment rate of lone parents with children over eleven is already very close to the employment target, whereas that of lone parents taken as a whole is around half of this figure (among others Gregg and Harkness 2003). The relatively high employment rate of lone parents with older children limits the potential contribution that moving this group into employment could make towards the employment target.

## ***2.5 Activation of lone parents based on the age of the youngest child***

A number of commentators have endorsed activating lone parents with older children (Deacon 1999, Toynbee 1999, see also Layard and Field quoted in Levitas 1998, more recently Freud 2007 and Stanley and Lohde 2004 and as early as the Commission for Social Justice Report 1994). In addition, the arguments for selecting on the basis of age of child seem compelling: It mirrors the current employment patterns of lone

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<sup>14</sup> The definition used by Berthoud (2003a) for this analysis differs from that used for the lone parent employment target. Being in employment is defined as working 16 hours or more per week or being in full-time education or training.

<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, if the employment target of 70 per cent was met for lone parents by 2010, then the proportion of dual earner couples would need to rise from 57 to 65 per cent and the proportion of unemployed couples fall from five to four per cent (Harker 2006; 13).

parents where the employment rate increases with the age of the youngest child, chimes with public opinion and is the criterion to select lone parents for activation most commonly used in other countries (see Carcillo and Grubb 2006). Furthermore, targeting lone parents with older children has been a feature of other New Labour policies such as the implementation of the New Deal for Lone Parents and the roll-out of Work-Focussed Interviews.

The current Labour government argues that lone parents with older children are able to work, whilst accepting that those with younger and very young children often cannot work. This seems to be referring to child development theories, which have proposed that the development of children may be negatively affected if the primary carer is engaging in paid work whilst they are very young. Child development in this context refers to both the behavioural and the cognitive development of children in the first years of their life. Developmental psychologists argue that children need to form secure, emotional bonds with their primary caregiver, whilst they are very young, in order to be able to form 'normal' relationships with others. Neuroscientists meanwhile have focused on the brain development of children and the role of external stimulation (for an introduction to both sets of theories, see Slater and Bremner 2003 and Slater and Muir 2000, and for a discussion of the policy relevance see Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). A full discussion of these two schools of thought is beyond the scope of this thesis. The main contribution of relevance in this context is that mothers are regarded as the key individuals as they tend to be the primary caregiver in most families. Therefore, the research on the link between child development and maternal employment has tried to address the following questions: when is it harmful to the development of the child if the mother is working, i.e. at what point can she start working, whether there is a difference in child outcomes regarding the number and pattern of the work hours, whether the employment behaviour of fathers has an effect, what role the quality of replacement care is playing and how and when the effect of maternal employment on child development and behaviour can be measured.

The effect of maternal employment on the cognitive and behavioural development of children has been a popular but contentious topic for decades and the subject of many studies, particularly in the United States (for research reviews see amongst others: Goldberg et al 2008, Gregg et al 2005 and Melhuish 2004). The reference point for these studies has tended to be maternal employment of mothers in couples before the child is one year old. The majority of recent studies from the US are based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979. However, despite using the same data

source and measurement of cognitive and behavioural development<sup>16</sup>, the studies have still arrived at varying results with regards to: the duration of the effects, the differences by gender, race and ethnicity, the number and pattern of hours worked, the employment pattern of the partner, the cognitive ability of the mother, type of childcare used and whether the mother worked in the second and third year of the child's life (for the most recent studies see Auginhbough and Gittleman 2005, Averett et al 2005, Baum 2004, Berger et al 2008, Berger et al 2005, Han et al 2006, Han 2005, Hill et al 2005, Joshi and Bogen 2007, Ruhm 2004, Waldfogel et al 2002 and for a meta analysis of these and other studies see Goldberg et al 2008)<sup>17</sup>. Gregg et al (2005), in their review of the relevant American literature, argued that the variations in the outcomes are due to the different treatment of the control variables.

Nevertheless, in their view there is evidence supporting the proposition that mothers in couples working full-time in the first year of a child's life, is likely to have negative outcomes for the development of the child, particularly regarding its cognitive development (Gregg et al 2005). Goldberg et al (2008), based on their meta-analysis of the American literature, contended that there are no overall statistically significant links between maternal employment and child development outcomes, per se, though the authors conceded that the following factors tend to have a negative effect on child development, especially if the children were white or boys: working full-time rather than part-time, mothers being from an upper or middle class background, couple families and working when the children are adolescents. In other words, the jury is still out as to whether the development of children is affected in a negative way if mothers (who have a partner) are working during the first year of the child's life and if true whether this is generally the case or only occurs in particular circumstances.

In terms of the effects of maternal employment on child development with regards to single parents, i.e. those who were lone parents at the birth of their child or soon thereafter, the studies are not conclusive either. However, both Goldberg et al (2008) and Gregg et al (2005) argued that the negative effect of maternal employment for mothers in couples does not hold for lone parents. Potential, though controversial, reasons given for this difference, are that the financial benefit of working is greater for

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<sup>16</sup> The National Longitudinal Youth Development Survey 1979 uses the Peabody Individual Achievement Test for vocabulary, reading and maths at different ages and the Child Behaviour Check List.

<sup>17</sup> Results also differ when other studies are used such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care (Brooks-Gunn et al 2002, Han 2005 and Huston and Rosenkrantz Aaronson 2005), the Fullerton Longitudinal Study (Gottfried and Gottfried 2006) and the National Survey of American Families (Han 2006).

lone parents than mothers in couples, that they have access to higher quality childcare and that they may themselves not provide high quality investments compared to mothers in couples (Gregg et al 2005). However, studies focussing specifically on lone mothers who were originally on welfare benefits, have suggested that negative cognitive and behavioural outcomes are not driven by employment, per se, but wider factors, such as: income security, job quality and stress levels (Kalil and Dunifon 2007 and Fuller et al 2002).

It is not clear to what extent the findings of the US studies are applicable to the British context, given the different environment in terms of: maternal employment rates and patterns, parental leave policies and childcare provision and funding. Far fewer studies have been carried out in the UK than in the US (Gregg et al 2005 and Melhuish 2004). There is some support for maternal employment, either before the child is one year old (and even before it is five), to have a slightly negative effect on the cognitive development of children (see Joshi and Verropoulou 2000 based on data from the 1958 National Child Development Study and Ermisch and Francesconi based on data from the British Household Panel study, both in Gregg et al 2005). For example, the results of analysis by the Avon Longitudinal Panel Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)<sup>18</sup> have suggested that full-time work before the child is 18 months old does have a negative effect on its later reading score, in particular for mothers who have formal qualifications and who use mainly informal care (Gregg et al 2005). However, whilst maternal employment when the child is under one year old may have negative effects, not working for the first three years of the child's life is also likely to have a negative impact on its development (Dex and Ward 2007 based on their analysis of the Millennium Cohort Survey). These findings should be treated with some caution, because other characteristics associated with not being in employment during the early years of the child, may come into play (Dex and Ward 2007).

Most studies have focussed on maternal employment during the first year or the first three years of the child's life, drawing on theories around social development and brain stimulation, as well as the greater need for physical care for very young children. However, a number of studies have alluded to the negative effects of parents working while the children are adolescents (see Goldberg 2008 for a review and Baum 2004). One study, focussing on lone parents of such older children, suggested that negative effects are limited to families where the lone parent experiences phases of job insecurity or unemployment or bad jobs, defined as low paid and without health

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<sup>18</sup> ALSPAC was a cohort study based on around 12,000 children born in 1991 and 1992 in the Avon area (Gregg et al 2005).



insurance benefits (Kalil and Ziol-Guest 2005). Still, the notion that older children are not affected if the primary caregiver is in employment is being challenged.

The main problems with the theories and research application of the effect of maternal employment on the cognitive and behavioural development of children are threefold. Firstly, there have been inconsistent results, suggesting a high level of sensitivity to sample and analysis design, thus making it difficult to reach reliable conclusions regarding the effects of maternal employment on child development. Secondly, the difference in employment patterns of mothers with young children in Britain, when compared to the US (see Gregg et al 2005) makes cross-cultural comparisons problematic. Finally, considering the broader horizon, the focus on children has largely led to the neglect of the unequal position of women in terms of their dual role as carers and workers in this new framework (Lister 2005) as well as their preferences, motivations and autonomy. Thus, there is some doubt that significant improvement for children can be achieved without focussing on the circumstances of mothers within the family (Millar and Ridge 2002).

In summary, despite the problems with measuring the effect of maternal employment on child outcomes, there would appear to be some consensus that full-time maternal employment in the first year of life tends to have a negative effect on the development of children, though this being mediated by the educational qualifications of the mothers and the quality of replacement care. However, this does not seem to hold for lone parents.

Targeting lone parents by the age of their youngest child has been a feature throughout the welfare-to-work policies of this government. NDLP was initially designed for lone parents with school aged children only. Moreover, the frequency of work-focussed-interviews increases with the age of the youngest child and varies depending on the existence and type of additional programmes in local areas.

## **2.6 Summary**

To summarise, the welfare reform entails the activation of lone parents with older children by transferring them onto JSA, effectively treating them very much like other jobseekers. Requiring lone parents with older children to be available for work is a step-change in British social policy in the post-war period, as previous governments

have tended to be either neutral or ambivalent about lone parents and employment. Furthermore, the targeting of lone parents according to the age of the youngest child has been an element throughout the welfare-to-work policies of the respective governments. The current government claims that the activation is justified in terms of: the higher labour market participation rate of mothers in couples in Britain and of lone mothers elsewhere, higher conditionality in other countries and the existence of an infrastructure in terms of support provided for lone parents to enter and stay in employment. The reform is intended to play a vital role in the government's strategy to reach the child poverty and the lone parent employment targets. Yet, targeting by the age of child has been an underlying element in the local administration of previous social assistance policies and more obviously in the welfare-to-work policies introduced by the current government. However, targeting lone parents with older children does not take into account recent familial separations and the associated upheaval, nor the employment chances of individuals.

## **CHAPTER 3: Lone parents not in work: a critical review of the research**

Over the past 20 years lone parents have been high on the political agenda, usually conceptualised as asocial or economic problem (see chapter two). In particular, the notion of lone parenthood as an economic problem has gained prominence from the late 1980s onwards owing to the increase in the number of lone parents on Income Support and the resulting increase in social security expenditure for this group (Kiernan et al 1988 and Millar 2006). As also discussed in chapter two, for the respective New Labour governments, the focus of welfare reform was on enabling people to move into work and therefore, the focus shifted towards trying to understand the reasons for the high levels of non-employment of particular groups such as lone parents. The explanations for unemployment generally, and lone parents in particular, tend to fall into two groups: structural and individual. The former has frequently been interpreted as infrastructure in terms of childcare provision and potential poverty traps. On the individual side of the explanation, the key question is essentially whether individuals are not able or do not want to move into employment. As outlined in the previous chapter, the focus is not on the infrastructure aspect but on targeting lone parents for work activation and the relationship to interpretations of 'ability to work'.

The aims of this chapter then are twofold: Firstly, to briefly discuss the two main sets of theories around the 'can't or won't' debate, namely the debates around employability (section 3.1) and work orientation (section 3.2). And secondly, to examine how lone parents not in work have been conceptualised and operationalised in the research commissioned (section 3.3) by the respective New Labour governments to prepare and evaluate their policy programme. The research can be grouped under four main headings, namely: characteristics (section 3.4), barriers (section 3.5) and distance to work (section 3.6).

### **3.1 Ability to get a job - employability**

Whether lone parents are able to get a job in the labour market has been part of the questions posed in the research reviewed here. This is frequently conceptualised in surveys as characteristics and barriers, e.g. questions on qualifications, health, childcare availability, recent work experience, some about basic skill levels and even perceptions of the local labour market and potential employer discrimination. There is

an argument in the employability literature, however, around the role of factors such as the actual state of the labour market and employer recruitment behaviour in determining the job chances of individuals rather than their skills and characteristics alone. Furthermore, there has been some debate over the nature and relative importance of different skills and how those are assessed by potential employers, particularly in the low skill sector. Therefore, if 'ability to work' is to mean ability to compete in the labour market, a number of factors come into play that have not been covered in the research as outlined below.

Given the range and differences in nature of the applications of employability as profiling tool or policy approach to activation, education or in corporations, the lack of clear definitions of the concept is unsurprising (see McQuaid and Lindsay 2005 and Gazier 2001 for a review of definitions). For example, the Chamber of British Commerce stated that: 'Day-to-day employability means being able to get or keep a job – in other words, the ability of an individual to add value to work. Also important, more broadly, is an individual's longer term ability to build a career and prosper in the flexible labour market' (1999; p.1). The definition developed by Hillage and Pollard (1998) is the most comprehensive focusing on employability:

'In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work.' (1999; p.2).

Yet, even when focusing on employability as a theoretical explanation for un- or non-employment, the meaning and scope of the term varies considerably (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005 and Gazier 2001) and there is little agreement in my opinion over aspects such as:

- the role of the local labour market, the overall economic climate and recruitment behaviour of employers in affecting the ability of an individual to get a job (among others Gore 2005, Devins and Hogarth 2005, Brown et al 2001),
- the role of networking (Lindsay 2002),

- the impact of 'subjective' employability, i.e. whether an individual believes they have a chance of getting a particular job or not (Brown et al 2003),
- what the appropriate outcome measure is, i.e. a job, any job or a good job (for a discussion in the different fields see Gazier 1999, Hillage and Pollard 1998 and Harvey 2001),
- the role of the social partners in ensuring employability (Gazier 1999),
- the role of personal factors such as health and caring responsibilities (Hillage and Pollard),
- the roles and respective importance of different kinds of skills (Hillage and Pollard 1998) and
- whether the focus is on the skills of the individual or factors affecting employability (Gazier 1999 and McQuaid and Lindsay 2005).

In the context of work activation, these points of disagreement can be divided into four main debates in my view. Firstly, which characteristics and attributes constitute the employability of an individual and, secondly, linked to this the role of factors beyond the individual's control, such as the local labour market. Thirdly, whether employability refers to a good job or any job is considered and finally, the role of personal factors. These four areas will be discussed below.

Skills are often seen as a key ingredient of employability (Leitch Review 2006). Yet, the relative importance of skills, in general, and the kind of skills in particular, in determining the employability of an individual is not straightforward for a number of reasons. The terminology with regards to skills is unclear, e.g. the overlap between so called 'transferable', 'core', 'soft' and 'employability' skills, as all of these are likely to include communication and team-working (Newton et al 2005). Irrespective of the terminology, a number of key skill areas can be identified in the low skill sector that are likely to be required, namely basic skills such as: literacy, numeracy, English language skills, interpersonal skills such as communication and team-working and ICT skills (Leitch Review 2006). In addition to having skills, their deployment and presentation when job searching is also important (Hillage and Pollard 1998). However, measuring skills can present difficulties as, in particular, the non-technical skills do not tend to fall into qualification categories (see review of link between low skills and employment by DfES and DWP 2007).

Nevertheless, the level of qualification is often used as a proxy for skills as are previous occupation and age (DFES and DWP 2007). In terms of being able to move into

employment, there is a clear link between the level of qualifications and employment, i.e. individuals without any qualifications are less likely to be in work than those with qualifications of at least NVQ2 level and this effect is more pronounced for women than men (DFES and DWP 2007 and Newton et al 2005). Based on their review of available evidence on recruitment of the unemployed, Newton et al (2005) suggested that the qualification requirements of a range of jobs have increased in response to an increased supply of university graduates. This, it is argued, has occurred without the nature of jobs changing, therefore making it more difficult for individuals without any qualifications to obtain employment (also Hogarth and Wilson 2003).

Many jobs in the low skill sector do not have minimum job requirements and where a technical qualification is required it is seen as important to get an interview, but not necessarily thereafter (Atkinson et al 1996). In a number of studies recent experience in the job has emerged as much more important (Belt and Richardson 2005, Devins and Hogarth 2005 and Atkinson et al 1996) as have: skills, motivation and references (Newton et al 2005). Rather than being a pre-requisite, qualifications have often been seen as an indicator of levels of general skills, such as literacy and numeracy, as well as an indication of aptitude and motivation (Newton et al 2005). However, a number of studies have suggested that employers pay more attention to interpersonal skills at the interview stage than any other factors (Newton et al 2005, Dench 1997 and Atkinson et al 1996) and particularly for low skilled positions tend to place greater emphasis on informal ways of recruiting and references (Devins and Hogarth 2005, Brown et al 2001, Atkinson et al 1996 and Newton et al 2005). It has been reported that employers tend to be less likely to recruit long-term unemployed due to concerns over their work ethic, even more so if those individuals have additional disadvantages, such as a health problem or a conviction (see among others Belt and Richardson 2005 and Hogarth and Wilson 2003, Fletcher 2003 and Brown et al 2001). Therefore, having networks with people in employment is likely to affect the ability of an individual to hear about and be recommended for a job given the prevalence of informal or internal recruitment methods which put those out of work at a disadvantage (Newton et al 2005, Wright-Brown and Konrad 2001 and Atkinson et al 1996).

Being able to get a job depends not only on the factors mentioned above, but also on the national and local labour markets. For example, if there is low unemployment in a local area, employers will be more likely to recruit from groups normally at a disadvantage, such as the long-term unemployed (Hogarth and Wilson 2003). Geographical analysis shows a concentration of unemployment in particular areas

(Webster 2003). Similarly, work activation schemes, as a whole, tend to work best whilst there is low unemployment nationally (Peck and Theodore 2000 and Finn 2000 among others). Brown et al (2003) identified this as the duality of employability, whereby absolute employability refers to whether an individual has the formal qualifications for a given job and relative employability to the value of those skills in a given labour market, i.e. how they relate to the overall supply of labour. Employment policy also plays the role of providing assistance with: job search, incentives in the tax and benefit system, increasing the employability of school leavers as well as providing other enabling factors, such as childcare and public transport (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005).

McQuaid and Lindsay (2002) argued that instead of the skills gap mentioned by employers, job-seekers are facing an “employability gap”, namely a ‘multi-dimensional disadvantage... a product of deficiencies in job seekers’ skills, but also; severely limited recent work experience; a lack of awareness of opportunities within the labour market; and the economic deprivation and social exclusion associated with the experience of long term unemployment and the impact of inflexible elements within the UK benefits system’ (in Lindsay 2002; p. 411). Therefore, it is important ‘to identify the key interrelated barriers that actually prevent someone from getting a new job, rather than merely identifying a subset, such as their ‘employability skills’ which may or may not be the actual main barrier’ (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; p. 207).

In other words, whilst qualifications have a role to play in terms of being taken as an indication for having a certain level of skills and commitment to learning, other factors seem to carry as much if not more weight; most of all recent work experience. There appear to be fewer jobs for people without qualifications, both in terms of their supply as well as the competition for them, particularly in areas of high unemployment. The recruitment behaviour of employers favours individuals with recent work experience or those participating in networks containing people in employment. All of this challenges the notion that individuals are able to significantly influence their own employability and thereby the extent to which it is their own responsibility.

When dividing employability into its different components, the third group of factors, after individual characteristics and external factors tends to be the so called ‘personal employability’, which refer to ‘household circumstances, work culture, access to resources’ and ‘adaptability and mobility’ (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005, p. 209-210,

table 1, also Hillage and Pollard 1998)<sup>19</sup>. 'Household circumstances' include caring responsibilities for children and other relatives as well as the ability to access safe and secure housing. 'Work culture' refers to an environment where participation in paid work is encouraged by family, friends and the wider community, whilst 'access to resources' entails such factors as: transport, financial and social capital resources, in particular networks (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). Whilst both Hillage and Pollard (1998) and Lindsay and McQuaid (2005) have identified personal employability as an important dimension of the concept, it has often been ignored in the wider literature on the subject (Heggie 2007). For women returners, confidence has emerged to be a key ingredient of employability (Heggie 2007). One reason for the lack of attention to personal factors could be that the vast majority of the employability literature reviewed above is focusing either on the long term unemployed, usually men, or on young people. Moreover, very few studies have addressed issues of gender and if they have done, it has tended to be in the context of competition for low skilled jobs between the long-term unemployed and women returners (Hogarth and Wilson 2003).

As will be highlighted later on in this chapter, for lone parents certain personal factors play an important part in their being able to find a job, in particular: the age of the youngest child, the number of children as well as the health status of the different family members.

### **3.2 Orientation to work**

While the debate around employability is more concerned with the aspect of whether individuals are able to get a job, the literature on work orientation centres around whether, and if so how, how many hours, mothers want to work. Orientation to work has tended to be operationalised as a battery of attitude questions around attitudes to work, gender roles and the benefit or otherwise of the mother staying at home to look after the child both to herself and the child. The relevant literature has examined the work orientation of mothers, because having children changes both the 'ability to work' in terms of structural constraints, such as the need for parental childcare, as well as potentially their motivations to work in terms of their own goals and identity. The literature has tended to focus on mothers because they remain the primary caregivers for young children within the family and are more likely than fathers to change their employment patterns substantially as a result of the arrival of a child (Himmelweit and

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<sup>19</sup> Lindsay and McQuaid (2005) put adaptability and mobility under individual factors. However, this researcher is of the opinion that this is shaped largely by circumstances and thus they have been moved into that category.



Sigala 2002). There are two central debates in the literature: The first addresses whether employment outcomes for mothers are the result of their choice or of constraints and the second investigates the different factors which determine the work and care orientation of mothers.

Firstly, regarding the ongoing debate whether the employment outcomes of women are the result of their preferences or structural barriers, the main proponent of the former argument is Hakim, who in her preference theory divided mothers into three groups: the home-centred group, the adaptive and the work-centred group according to their attitudes towards work and parenting (Hakim 2002). According to Hakim the employment behaviour of women is a reflection of their preferences and therefore, any woman who is working part-time is not fully committed to working (Hakim 1995). Hakim's preference theory has attracted a lot of criticism, in particular, opponents have disputed that mothers in Western countries are now able to choose their work patterns and are no longer subject to constraints (Ginn et al 1996 and Crompton and Harris 1998, for a full discussion of Hakim's work, see recent thesis on this subject: Meads 2007). Nevertheless, Hakim's preference theory is still influencing research in this field.

However, a number of studies have contained suggestions that constraints such the cost of working given the predominance of low earnings set against high childcare costs, the identity as mothers and the absence of childcare alternatives are also influencing work outcomes (see among others Crompton and Harris 1999, Gash 2005, Himelweit and Sigala 2002 and Walters 2005). Others such as Marks and Houston (2002) are arguing in support of Hakim. They have suggested that three sets of attitudes, namely: the strength of work commitment, negative views on motherhood and views on alternative child care arrangements to mothers, are relatively good predictors of mother's employment behaviour at that point in time irrespective of differences in social class (Marks and Houston 2002). Whereas Davey et al (2005) in their cohort studies of the motivation of nurses to return to work after maternity leave propose that the most important motivations for returning to work are: financial need, the work situation identity and lifestyle, rather than wanting a career. Moreover, it is possible to distinguish between those returning to work and those staying at home on the basis of their attitudes, but not between those returning full-time or part-time.

James and Charles (2003), looking across the life course argue that work or family commitment are not by themselves explanatory indicators for part-time or full-time work. Kan (2005) similarly argues for a link between the attitudes towards gender roles

and employment outcomes over time. However, she also posits that constraints do not seem to be absent for women yet, as even work-centred women continue to change their labour market behaviour after the arrival of children, without necessarily changing their views. Finally, she argued that while attitudes inform behaviour, labour market experiences also shape attitudes.

Crompton and Harris (1998) have developed another typology of women and work orientation that includes the influence of constraints though Nolan (2005) argues that both end categories are overlapping with the typology of Hakim. Walters (2005) has also identified three different groups: the home-orientated, the stickers and the aspirers. She also suggests that women should be placed along a continuum based on their attitudes to work and their work orientation rather than into distinct groups, as are fluid and may change over time (Walters 2005). Raskey (2008) has suggested that internal negotiations and adaptations can be ongoing as the conflict between working and parenting is constantly in flux. Whereas Hakim (2002) asserts that the preferences of the home and work-centred groups do not change throughout their lives, even with the arrival of children, a number of studies contain arguments that preference may change over time, for example as a result of job insecurity or experiences (e.g. Himmelweit and Sigala 2004, Kan 2005 and Nolan 2005).

Theories of a 'dependency culture' are arguably a variation of this interpretation except that they focus on those out of work rather than mothers specifically. Developed in America by Murray and Mead the underclass theories shaped the rhetoric in Britain in the 1990s (see Lewis 1995, Kiernan et al 1998 and Duncan and Edwards 1997). Essentially, the argument is that staying on benefits for too long means losing the inclination to go to work and that life on benefits can become the norm for some spatial concentrations of groups as well as across generations. Within this discourse, lone parenthood is seen as a 'social problem', but as a 'social threat' to society (Duncan and Edwards 1997 and Lewis 1995). However, in the UK the debate focused more on the outcomes for children of lone parents than the effect it had on men, as was the case in the US discourse (Lewis 1995). Surveys of lone parents regularly report that 90 per cent of lone parents not in work say that they would like to work (see among others, Evans et al 2003). In spite of this evidence the underclass debate of the 1980s and 1990s has seen a resurgence of late (Layard 1998 in Peck and Theodore 2000).

This leads to the second debate, namely the influences on the parent/work orientation of mothers. They can be divided into two groups according to the reach of their

explanations in my view. One set of theories, usually based on comparative research, argues that mothers' preferences for whether and how to combine care and paid work are determined by the institutional arrangements of welfare states, as well as cultural practices. By contrast, the other set of theories focuses on the influence of the behaviour and views of the immediate circle of the mothers, i.e. their parents, partners and friends.

Considering the first stance, that of paid work patterns being influenced by welfare state arrangements, it has been argued that the effects of maternity leave and childcare policies (Meyers et al 1999) and taxation (Sainsbury 1999 and Pfau-Effinger (2005 see Meads 2007 for a discussion) are of importance. The comparative literature has consistently highlighted the effect of different institutional arrangements on the employment outcomes for mothers (see for example Sainsbury 1999, Lewis and Ostner 1994 and Orloff 1993). Moreover, Pfau-Effinger (2005) expands the argument by drawing out the importance of the historical development of family models within welfare state arrangements, which have led to the creation of different gender cultures. She states that

'practices of motherhood in each time and space, as I would argue, can be seen as an outcome of cultural ideals with respect to motherhood within the respective gender arrangement, as well as a response to institutional regulation and a result of the creativity and reflectivity of individuals who are able to change practices and create new ones.' (Pfau-Effinger 1999, p. 66).

Crompton and Harris (1998) place more emphasis on the influence of the welfare state, by arguing that the male breadwinner mode, though now weakening, has had a substantial influence on the formation of 'major institutions, including welfare regimes, education systems, social security systems, etc.', as well as 'ideas about masculinity and femininity' and to an extent occupational structures (p. 132).

In contrast to the theories above, which argue that institutional factors, often at a national level, shape the expectations of mothers, a number of authors have argued that normative factors from the direct environment of mothers are the main contributing factors to the formation of their work orientations. For example, Aizen's theory of planned behaviour suggests that behaviour, i.e. decisions over when and how much to

work when having children, can be predicted based on someone's intentions, which in turn are influenced by 'attitudes towards such behaviour, by social norms perceived to be endorsed by significant others (subjective norms), and by beliefs about the resources and opportunities to engage in that behaviour (perceived behavioural control)' (in Houston and Marks 2003, p. 2000).

The theory of planned behaviour is similar to the 'gendered moral rationality' theory proposed by Duncan and Edwards (1999). Based on qualitative studies with lone mothers in different areas, they argue that decisions of lone mothers about employment are essentially influenced by their 'moral' views on what is best for their children, the views and behaviour of other mothers around them, i.e. their family and friends, that those views are 'gendered' as they are focusing on mothering rather than parenting. Moreover, these views are 'rational' as women are weighing up their preferences within the set of options given by their earning potential, childcare costs, etc. Duncan et al suggested in a later study (2003) that the presence of a partner does not seem to influence the work orientation much and that factors such as ethnicity, class and to a certain extent income, are more important in determining whether mothers worked at all, part-time or full-time. Williams (2005) argues along similar lines, namely that the decisions of mothers, with regards to employment, are very much influenced by norms based on views and actions of family members and local networks, as well as the local traditions regarding women's employment. The influence of friends has been supported through analysis of BHPS data, which shows very similar employment behaviour of respondents and their three closest friends (Himmelweit and Sigala 2004).

The theory of 'gendered moral rationalities' is also a critique of classic economic theory based on the idea of rational actors, which tries to explain the employment outcomes of women in terms of the most financially advantageous decisions for mothers (Becker in Himmelweit and Sigala 2002). A number of studies have suggested that financial considerations are playing a part in this decision, but perhaps more importantly that mothers tend to 'take such decisions with reference to moral and socially negotiated (not individual) views about what behaviour is right and proper, and this varies between particular social groups, neighbourhoods and welfare states' (Duncan et al 2003, p. 310). Focusing on rational choice as the main explanation can lead to 'welfarism', namely a simplistic reduction of the problem into financial incentives and information requirements.

The main problems with theories around work and care orientations are,:

- Firstly, that there is a lack of clarity regarding the respective roles of normative and cultural factors and even what these consist of. For example, local or even national patterns of female employment have been treated as cultural factors by some authors and normative by others.
- Secondly, much of the research in this area has focused on mothers in couples where financial constraints have usually referred to the second rather than the main income and have therefore been framed as decisions about lifestyles rather than poverty.
- Thirdly, many of the studies have been qualitative and have drawn on samples from particular professions. As a result, some of the differences in their findings are likely to be a reflection of the nature of the chosen samples.
- Finally, clear definitions and therefore distinction between attitudes to work, work orientation and preference is missing in the literature (see ESRC 2009).

In summary, it appears that the work orientation of women is influenced not only by institutional and cultural factors, but also by the views and behaviours of their reference groups. Regardless of whether it is conceptualised as a typology or as a continuum between work and family orientation, the actual work outcome seems still to be the result of both preferences and constraints and potentially change over time.

### **3.3 Scope of the review**

Following on from the discussion of two main theoretical approaches focussing on the individual to explain unemployment that are relevant in this context, the next three sections will examine how, or indeed whether, these debates have been operationalised in the empirical research focusing on lone parents. The emphasis of the respective New Labour governments on evidence-based-policy will be outlined in the following chapter. The political focus on enabling inactive groups such as lone parents to move into employment has led to a substantial body of research to be commissioned to inform and evaluate policy innovations such as the New Deal for Lone Parents. Therefore, this review of existing research focuses on the evidence base that has been established through government sponsored research<sup>20</sup>. This is a

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<sup>20</sup> For the purpose of this chapter not in work is defined as not working any hours. The reasons are twofold: Firstly, someone working between 1-15 hours per week is more likely to increase their hours to 16 or more per week at some stage than someone who is not working at all (Kasparova et al 2003). Secondly, the government's employment target for lone parents of 70 per cent of lone parents in employment by 2010 is based lone parents working 1 or more hours

substantial and largely self-contained body of research<sup>21</sup>. However, independent research will also be included in the discussion at the end of the chapter.

Included in this review are all the studies commissioned by the respective government departments that have included a substantial proportions of non-working lone parents in their sample. The starting point for the review is 1989 because this is arguably the point at which the research interest in lone parents re-awakened. Following the re-discovery of poverty debate in 1965, the Finer Report and the subsequent legislation introducing child benefit in 1975, lone parenthood received less political attention until the mid-1980s.

Over the past 20 years the Department for Work and Pensions (and its predecessors) has commissioned one ad-hoc survey (1989 survey), one cohort survey (PRILIF) of lone parents and one survey of families with children that had both a panel and a cross-sectional element (FACS). In addition to these, most major policy programmes, such as the introduction of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and ONE have been accompanied by evaluation programmes containing both qualitative and quantitative research studies focusing on lone parents out of work. Figure 3.1 below presents the design, content and report references of the respective surveys and figure 3.2 the same information for the qualitative studies. This review builds on the previous research reviews, also commissioned by government, that by Holtermann et al (1999) on parents and their labour market participation and that by Millar and Ridge (2001) on low income families.

With regards to the timing of the research, an increase in output in terms of research reports is noticeable from 1998 onwards and this ties in with the election of the current Labour government and its focus on evidence-based policy-making (see the following chapter). Furthermore, after a period of substantial data collection on lone parents more generally, mainly around the introduction of the New Deal for Lone Parents in the late 1990s, there has been a shift towards the analysis of existing survey data (of FACS: Barnes et al 2008a, Hales et al 2008), administrative data (Knight et al 2006, Dolton et al 2006, Knight and Lissenburgh 2005) or combinations of the two (Knight and Kasparova 2006). In addition, research projects have homed in on particular

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per week. According to the 2003 wave of the Families and Children Survey, 53 per cent of lone mothers were working one or more hours per week in 2003, 48 per cent were working over 16 hours and 5 per cent under 16 hours. Thus, 47 per cent of lone mothers were not working at all at the time of the survey (Barnes et al 2004, p. 135).

<sup>21</sup> The self-referencing nature is evident in the reference section of most reports, even some literature reviews (for example, Bell et al 2005 and Collins et al 2006).

delivery aspects, such as: sanctions (Goodwin 2007), the NDLP plus pilot and its extensions (Hosain and Breen 2007 and Jenkins 2008), Work Focussed Interviews (Thomas and Jones 2006), employment zones (Griffiths and Jones 2005), the relationship between moving in and out of poverty and work (Barnes et al 2008b) and the Employment Retention and Advancement Demonstration Project (ERAD – for example, Dorsett et al 2007). Finally, methods such as qualitative longitudinal research (Millar and Ridge 2009) and random assignment have been applied to this area (ERAD). These studies will be discussed below.

**Figure 3.1: Main government sponsored surveys including lone parents**

	<b>Bradshaw and Millar</b>	<b>PRILIF</b>	<b>NDLP pilot</b>	<b>ONE</b>	<b>NDLP postal</b>	<b>FACS</b>	<b>PA meetings</b>
<b>Survey type</b>	Cross section	Cohort	Cross section with follow up element	Cross section	Cross section	Longitudinal with cross section	Longitudinal
<b>Data collection</b>	CAPI + postal follow up	CAPI	CAPI	CAPI	Postal	CAPI	CAPI
<b>Fieldwork</b>	1989	1991,1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998 and 2001	1997-1998	2000-2001	2000 - 2001	1999-	2002
<b>Base</b>	All lone parents excl. widowers	All lone parents	Lone parents on IS with youngest child over 5 <sup>22</sup>	Lone parents making new IS claims in 4 ONE pilot and 4 control areas	All lone parents on IS	All lone parents	Lone parents on IS required to attend PA meetings
<b>Sample size</b>	1.820 lone parents	940 lone parents 1991 of which 548 (58 per cent) left in 2001	4.322 lone parents	1.445 lone parents	42.373 lone parents	2.146 lone parents in 2002	3.357 lone parents
<b>Reports</b>	Bradshaw and Millar 1991	Marsh and McKay 1993, McKay and Marsh 1994, Ford et al 1995, Marsh et al 1997, Ford et al 1998, Finlayson and Marsh 1998, Finlayson et al 2000, Marsh and Vegeris 2004	Hales et al 2000b	Green et al 2000	Lessof et al 2001	Marsh et al 2001, Kasparova et al 2003, Marsh and Perry 2003, Barnes et al 2004	Coleman et al 2003

<sup>22</sup> Plus a booster sample of NDLP participants and IS leavers in the NDLP pilot and comparison areas.



**Figure 3.2: Government sponsored qualitative research studies with lone parent**

	<b>NDLP prototypes</b>	<b>NDLP – innovative schemes</b>	<b>NDLP – individuals</b>	<b>NDLP – personal advisers</b>	<b>Work, childcare balance</b>	<b>WFI, work search premium and In work Credit</b>
<b>Sampling strategy</b>	All lone parents out of work with some sampled from the NDLP admin database	Purposive sample of NDLP participants, leavers, non-completers and non-participants	All lone parents with particular emphasis on lone fathers, NDLP participants and non-participants	Purposive sample of lone parents who had participated in Phase One of the NDLP	Purposive sample of lone parents with children under 10 to capture range of work and childcare combinations	Purposive sample of lone parents to capture range of possible pilot combinations
<b>Data collection</b>	Face-to-face interviews with topic guide	Face-to-face interviews with topic guide	Face-to-face interviews with topic guide	Face-to-face interviews with topic guide	Face-to-face interviews	Face-to-face, follow-up by telephone
<b>Fieldwork</b>	1998	1998	1999	1999	2004	2006
<b>Sample size</b>	78 lone parents	95 lone parents	121 lone parents	40 lone parents	78 lone parents	70 lone parents (50 were followed up 3 months later)
<b>Reports</b>	Finch et al (1999)	Woodfield and Finch (1999)	Dawson et al 2000	Lewis et al 2000	Bell et al 2005	Ray et al 2007

### ***3.4 The characteristics of lone parents not in work***

Millar and Ridge (2001) have pointed out that the composition of the non-working population and barriers to work have been the two main areas of the research on this group. However, in addition, studies have included questions on work orientation, employability and distance to work.

Most survey reports have started with a comparison of the characteristics of lone parents in and out of work (Millar and Ridge 2001) in order to answer the following two questions: who are the lone parents not in work and whether they differ in systematic ways from those lone parents in employment and if so, in which. Implicit in this approach is also the question whether particular characteristics are the reasons why some lone parents are not in employment. Based on a descriptive comparison of characteristics, the studies mentioned above have largely agreed that lone parents not in work are: more like to have a child under five, be a single lone parent rather than divorced or widowed, have three or more children, live in social housing, have few or no qualifications and suffer from ill-health (see Millar and Ridge 2001).

In addition to comparing the characteristics of lone parents who were and were not in work, the relative influence of characteristics has been modelled in order to establish which of the factors are the most important. On the whole, multivariate analyses of the factors affecting the employment status of lone mothers have produced broadly similar results: the key distinguishing characteristics of lone parents not in work compared with those in work relate to: family composition, route into lone parenthood, level of qualifications, recent work experience and health status and work orientations, in particular not being in work is associated with

- Having a child under five,
- Having three or more children,
- Being single rather than divorced or separated,
- Having a health problem,
- Not having any qualifications,
- Not having any recent work experience and
- Not looking to move into work.

(see PRILIF publications, Bradshaw and Millar 1991, Payne and Range 1998, Holtermann et al 1999 and Evans et al 2004).

Some studies have suggested additional factors to be of relevance, such as: access to childcare (Bradshaw and Millar 1991 – working full-time), receipt and duration of IS (McKay 2002), not having access to a driving licence, particularly when also having access to a car (McKay 2002) and not being 'ready to work'. However, the impact of these and other factors such as: maintenance, educational qualifications and health is contested (see Bradshaw and Millar 1991 for a discussion as well as Marsh and McKay 1994 and 1997, McKay 2002).

Despite the consensus on the key characteristics of lone parents not in work (Millar and Ridge 2001), there have been problems with this approach. Characteristics as operationalised in surveys have tended to encompass a wide range of aspects in the surveys from personal characteristics of the lone parents (such as age, health, number and age of children and family status), past activities (such as: work history and educational qualifications) to financial circumstances (such as benefit receipt and, more recently, savings and debts). The different types of characteristics tend to be given the same weight, irrespective of whether they are: individual, structural or socio-economic characteristics and regardless of whether they are open to policy influence or not.

In addition, some variables included in the surveys, for example whether the respondent has a driving licence and access to a car and their housing tenure, are not a characteristic of individuals as such. Rather they are an indication of their overall income level (although some of that might relate to previous income levels, e.g. where the lone parent has stayed in the family home) or other disadvantages linked to being a social tenant (Holtermann et al 1999). Nevertheless, the assessment by Millar and Ridge of the research having presented 'a very complete and generally consistent picture' with regards to the characteristics of lone parents not in work (2001: 147) appears to be fair.

### **3.5 *Barriers to employment***

The second most prominent approach in the research on lone parents not in work has been the focus on barriers to work. However, whilst the research into the characteristics of lone parents not in work has generally been shown consistent results, the analysis of barriers to work has produced more mixed results. There

seems to be general agreement on the descriptive level, yet, less is known about the interactions and longevity of barriers to work.

Barriers to work have been operationalised as a concept in both quantitative and qualitative research, by asking lone parents about their perceived barriers to work. According to the research reviews, the main barriers to work for lone parents are:

- A preference to be staying at home with the child(ren),
- Childcare issues (either that it is not available or affordable or that parents prefer to only entrust it to friends and relatives),
- Lack of confidence,
- Personal health or that of the child(ren),
- Financial issues (concerns about the financial disruption when going to work and not bring better off),
- Employment conditions (the attitudes of employers and availability of flexible jobs) and
- Lack of skills and qualifications.

(see reviews by Holtermann 1999 and Millar and Ridge 2001).

Looking at the survey questions around barriers more closely, reveals that two different questions have been asked in the various surveys. As can be seen in figure 3.3, the question wording differs between all the surveys with regards to reasons for not looking for work (the main or a particular reason or any number of reasons) and with regards to the type of job (any job, regular paid job, working 16 hours, etc.). In terms of difference in wording, the FACS version asking about the particular reasons has the strongest inference that the respondents needed to have a reason not to look for work. In contrast, the way this was put in the ONE survey, together with the NDLP pilot, are the weakest, as, for example in the latter case, the wording referring to 'regular paid job' leaves room for the respondents potentially doing occasional work.

**Figure 3.3: Wording of questions concerning reasons for not looking for work**

Survey	Wording	References
Bradshaw and Millar	'What is the main reason for not wanting a paid job'	Bradshaw and Millar 1991; 43
PRILIF	'What have you found the most difficult aspects in getting and keeping work? What would you say where your best achievements, if any, at getting and keeping paid work?  Taking everything together, what might have made things better for you to get and keep paid work?'	Finlayson et al 2000
FACS	'Is there anything in particular that is stopping you looking for a job of 16 or more hours?'	Kasparova et al 2003; 54
NDLP pilot	Main reason for not wanting a regular paid job	Hales et al 2000b; 77
ONE	Reasons for not looking for work	Green et al 2003; 105

A number of the qualitative studies have explored barriers to work without trying to rank them according to their importance (see Lewis et al 2000 and Dawson et al 2000). However, Woodfield and Finch (1999) did so and suggests that the two most important barriers are lack of confidence and of childcare, followed in perceived order of importance by: lack of relevant work experience/ skills/ qualifications, employer attitudes, concern about financial transition and anxiety over how to combine care and work responsibilities. Dawson et al (2000) also agrees that confidence is the most important barrier to work. Confidence emerges as one of the main barriers in the surveys, but by no means as the most important. Whilst the main barriers to work can be identified by looking across the survey reports as wanting to spend time with the child and the absence of childcare, the relative importance of other barriers is less clear.

The actual term 'barriers' has been introduced with the NDLP surveys, that is the earlier surveys did not used the term as part of the question wording. The NDLP pilot

survey also asked about ‘things that would make work difficult’ for the respondents, whereby they were asked to agree or disagree whether a factor presented a difficulty for them, e.g. ‘I need to be very flexible about the hours I work’ (Hales et al 2000b; 78). As the ONE survey and the NDLP pilot survey have added a question about perceived barriers as well as reasons for not looking for work therefore permitting a comparison between the responses to the two questions. Responses to the question about perceived or potential barriers were fuller, more personal and more tangible than those on reasons for not working, e.g. not having money for clothes to go to job interviews (see tables 3.1 and 3.2 below), thereby highlighting the link between question wording and responses even within the same survey.

**Table 3.1: Reason for not looking for work – results from various surveys**

Column %	<b>Bradshaw and Millar (all postpone)</b>	<b>PRILIF (1994 – all not working)</b>	<b>NDLP pilot survey (1998 - postpone work)</b>	<b>ONE Survey (2000/2001 all not working)</b>	<b>FACS (2001 data-work postpone)</b>
<b>To be with the children</b>	58	41	49	82	45
<b>Ill health</b>	3	11	17	14	21
<b>Worse off in work</b>	3	26	4	21	7
<b>Childcare</b>	6	49	3	31	39
<b>Benefit loss</b>	11	-	-	9	3
<b>Other</b>	19	40	8	15	30
<b>Total percentage</b>	100	167	81	179	145
<b>Number of cases</b>	335	365	919	304	675

Where the total percentage is above 100 more than one answer was possible.

Sources: Bradshaw and Millar 1991, table 4.18 (own calculations), p. 43; Ford 1996, table 2.2, p. 17; NDLP pilot survey Hales et al 2000b, table 4.3.6, p. 77, Green et al 2000, table 5.14, p. 106, Kasparova et al., 2003, table 3.6, p. 54.

**Table 3.2: Perceived barriers to work – results from various surveys**

Column %	NDLP pilot survey (work postpone group)	NDLP postal survey (all lone parents on IS not working)	ONE survey (all lone parents on IS not working any hours)	WFI evaluation (wave 1 respondents who also took part in wave2)
<b>Lack of childcare</b>	62	52	-	19
<b>Children need lone parent around</b>	-	55	-	41
<b>Health condition</b>	-	23	11	35
<b>Worse off in work</b>	-	50	32	16
<b>Lack of qualifications</b>	44	51	28	20
<b>Lack of confidence</b>	-	46	31	30
<b>Lack of work experience</b>	35	Combined with qualifications	-	17
<b>Lack of local jobs</b>	21	37	39	18
<b>Employer discrimination</b>	20	46	-	7
<b>Lack or cost of transport</b>	37	-	29	13
<b>Other</b>	49 <sup>23</sup>	42	154 <sup>24</sup>	109
<b>Total percentage</b>	268	401	324	325
<b>Number of cases</b>	919	33.742	744	1997

Lessof et al 2001, table 6.1.1, p. 49 (own calculation); Hales et al 2000b, table 4.3.7, p. 78, Green et al 2000, table 5.15, p. 109 (own calculation), Coleman et al 2003; table 2.10, 36). Multiple answers were possible in all three surveys.

Thus, whilst all the studies appear to identify the wish to be with the child(ren) as the most important barrier, as discussed above, ranking the other barriers seems more difficult (see tables 3.1 and 3.2 above and also DWP 2005). For example, the importance of childcare as a reason for not being in work varies considerably between the studies even when taking into account the fact that its the sample of

<sup>23</sup> Mainly about debts and not having clothes for job interviews.

<sup>24</sup> Mainly concerns around the financial transition when moving into work.

lone parents the NDLP pilot survey had slightly older children than in the other surveys. However, wanting to spend time with children consistently has come out as the main reason in all of the surveys. This concurs with findings from the qualitative studies, which have shown that lone parents perceive their responsibility to care for the child(ren) as most important and that employment would have to fit around this (see also Millar and Ridge 2001). Cognitive research may have been useful in these circumstances to elucidate potential differences in the interpretation of the question wording by respondents. The Department of Work and Pensions had been planning to commission a piece of cognitive research on these questions according to their most recent research programme (DWP 2003), but this was later regarded as unnecessary (Collins et al 2008).

In addition to not being able to put barriers in order of importance and issues about the comparability between surveys, government sponsored research to date has also not been successful regarding the nature, importance, occurrence and life span of barriers to lone parents moving into work. Millar and Ridge argue that 'understanding the relative importance of these [barriers], how they interact with each other, and how they apply to different types of lone parents is more complex' (2001; 146). They continue that 'these sorts of questions require a more theory-based approach and the concept of identity ... as a mother as forming part of the context in which people frame their orientation to the labour market' (2001, p. 147-148).

A review of DWP of research on barriers to employment for lone parents has come to a similar conclusion, namely that

'an over reliance on the concept of 'barriers' could be seen to be limiting our potential to: understand the choice lone parents make about caring for their children at different stages of their and their child's life; and understand the constraints lone parents experience in exercising their choices and in making decisions about work; and to derive more effective strategies for supporting lone parents' transition into and attachment to the labour market' (DWP 2005, p. 1).



The lack of investigation and hence understanding of these factors means that the previous research has failed to establish:

- Which barriers can be overcome and which are likely to continue to pose difficulties,
- Whether they would require change in policies such as a re-structuring of benefit rules or a change in the circumstances of the individuals,
- Whether they are perceived or actual barriers, e.g. employer discrimination could be a perceived barrier, whereas low qualifications an actual barrier,
- Whether if someone names multiple barriers it means that they are further away from the labour market,
- Whether different barriers appear at different stages for lone parents, in terms of their distance from the labour market and
- The basis of the perceptions of barriers, i.e. whether the anticipated barriers are based on previous experience of employer discrimination or trying to find a childcare place.

Recognising the limitations of the previous research and the lack of progress on this topic, the Department for Work and Pensions has commissioned a review of existing research on barriers and piloted a new set of questions (see Collins et al 2006 and D'Souza et al 2008). A panel of experts who were consulted as part of the project listed the following areas which were currently either not at all or not fully explored:

- The role of social capital,
- Lone parents' 'moral attitudes towards work'. which here refers to the influence of the views of people around lone parents, i.e. relatives and friends,
- Lone parents' 'moral attitudes towards parenting', the argument being that the barriers section in the various surveys have not contained sufficient questions to capture the fact that not wanting to spend time away from the children frequently is the main barrier,
- The role of informal care, i.e. to what extent are lone parents comfortable with using formal care and if not, do they have access/feel they can ask for informal care and
- Future work prospects: rather than concentrating what lone parents would like to do now or shortly to move to a life course approach asking about the longer term plans and whether they have thought about stepping stones to reach those longer-term goals.

The review of the literature in Collins et al (2006), carried out to prepare the new set of questions on barriers, limited itself almost exclusively to government reports. The work by Duncan and Edwards is the only report mentioned that has not been commissioned by government (Collins et al 2006). The main focus of the review by Collins et al (2006) is the typology of work and care orientations of lone parents developed by Bell et al (2005). This typology by Bell et al (2005) is linked to the work by Aizen on reasoned action, which was applied by Diane Houston in series of studies on mothers' decisions to work (see her paper in Collins et al 2006).

The result of the aforementioned consultation and testing, is that respondents from 2007 onwards are asked: to list all their current activities, about anticipated future events, to distinguish what they would like to see happen from what they expect to happen and the answering options include both changes to the family composition, e.g. a new partner and/or new child, moving home, doing voluntary work or studying as well as staying home and looking after the child(ren) and moving into paid work. The timescale of these anticipated events is kept deliberately vague, as the cognitive testing showed that respondents tended to answer using timescales relevant to them, rather than the three years suggested in the original question wording (Collins et al 2006). In addition, respondents are now asked whether they have a specific job in mind that they would like to do. The question on barriers is phrased in terms of factors playing a role in the decision-making around entering work and respondents are asked to weight the different factors using a card sort exercise, with that specific job in mind. Finally, additional attitudinal questions have been introduced focussing more on how lone parents aim to combine parenting and working and aimed at capturing the perceived expectations of their immediate network, i.e. their (current or former) partner, parents and friends.

The report (D'Souza et al 2008) presenting the results from the exercise stated that clear groups could be identified, in terms of their attitudes towards work and caring and that the different characteristics of the groups were relatively coherent. Once more waves of FACS are available, it may be possible to shed more light on what drives movement between these groups.

### **3.6 Distance to work - measuring employability?**

The third aspect that has been explored repeatedly in the research discussed here, has been the concept of 'distance to work'. Essentially, this refers to the notion that lone parents can be placed along a continuum relative to each other in terms of their likelihood or timing of moving into work. Distance to work is part of the debates around employability, work orientation and barriers as will be demonstrated below.

Starting with employability: All definitions of employability put forward accept that employability is about work (Hillage and Pollard (1998) and therefore, the measurement of success tends to refer to getting a job or another job, depending on the starting point. Yet, employability in the context of work activation has frequently been conceptualised as a continuum indicating distance to work (see for example Martin and Roberts 1984 and Gazier 1999). This is based on the socio-medical model of employability developed in the 1950s, which focuses on the abilities and progress of mentally and physically handicapped (sic) individuals towards being able to move into employment (Gazier 1999). However, one of the general difficulties with the concept of distance to work is that the specifications can be poorly defined or overly complex (all in Gazier 1999).

Governments have developed increasingly sophisticated profiling tools to assess the employability of an individual or groups of people, either solely on their characteristics or taken in conjunction with current labour market conditions (Rudolph 2001, Gazier 1999 and OECD proceedings 1998). Moreover, debates regarding the profiling of out of work individuals have highlighted that it is not clear whether an improvement in the employability of an individual can be measured along a particular scale, as suggested by the socio-medical model of employability. For example, Bryson and Kasparova (2003) tried without success to identify characteristics for profiling purposes using the (short) panel of the ONE evaluation. Thus, its inclusion in the targets set for organisations delivering work activation programmes has been contested (Eberts 2001, Gazier 1999 and OECD proceedings 1998). It is important to stress at this stage that in order for employability to be constructed and measured along a scale, it needs to be conceptualised as an individual concept, i.e. ignoring other factors such as the local labour market conditions or recruitment practices by employers.

Another way of conceptualising employability as a scale is the concept of multiple disadvantages as developed by Berthoud (2003a). He argues that combinations of disadvantages, such as: lone parenthood, ill health, age, lack of recent work experience and qualifications tend to have a cumulative effect on the speed of employment entry of different groups (Berthoud 2003). The concept of multiple disadvantages has also increasingly been used by the Department for Work and Pension, who have supplemented additional disadvantages to those of disability, ethnicity and lone parenthood, the new inclusions being: drug or alcohol abuse, homelessness, lack of qualifications and having had a prison record (Marshall and Joyce 2007).

A recent report suggested sub-dividing JSA customers (including lone parents) into three groups: the 'work ready', the 'progression to work' and the 'no conditionality' group, in the wider context of a personalised framework of conditionality and support (Gregg 2008). However, the author suggested that for now this should be done for general characteristics rather than using a sophisticated profiling tool, as this is not yet in place and as the information to build it was lacking (Gregg 2008). In other words, the criteria for grouping lone parents and other customer groups have not been established.

Yet, 'distance to work' conceptualised as the timescale of lone parents for moving into work, has feature in much of government sponsored research. In other words, lone parents were asked when they thought they would be moving into work. This has been the third most prominent concept in government sponsored research on lone parents. It was first applied to this area by Bradshaw and Millar drawing on an earlier survey on women and employment (Martin and Roberts 1984), arguing that 'this approach can better capture the dynamics of employment and is especially useful for examining the reasons for why women move in and out of employment' (1991; 42). The concept of 'distance from work' views employment and unemployment as a continuum, with full-time employment at one end and economic inactivity at the other and individuals are placed on this continuum according to their own timescale for moving into work. Indicators of whether such a concept indeed captures lone parents own perceptions of their timelines would indicate clear groupings and either that the timescales match their anticipation or produce reasons for moving into work faster or more slowly.

The purpose of using the distance from work concept in the analysis of both the survey and the qualitative data, was to divide the non-working population into groups according to their position along the continuum of distance towards work. All the relevant studies have been drawing out the characteristics of the different groups. In addition, depending on the method, either the size of the different groups or the main factors underlying the positioning and therefore affecting the progression along the continuum have been highlighted. However, there is agreement at the general level that non-working lone parents can be divided into three groups: 'work ready', i.e. those looking to move into work immediately or very soon, 'work postpone', those who would like to work at some point in the future, and 'never work', those who do not know when they will enter employment and those who do not see themselves doing so at all. Regarding the findings from both quantitative and qualitative research, the characteristics of the three groups also appear to be relatively clear:

### **The 'work ready' group**

The 'work ready' group referred to lone parents who are looking to move into work, either immediately or within the next six to twelve months. According to the surveys in figure 3.1 this group was more likely to:

- have one child,
- have children aged between five to ten years,
- have better qualifications,
- have recent work experience,
- be receiving maintenance,
- have a driving licence,
- have use of a car and
- to name the lack of affordable childcare as the main reason for not working.

### **The 'never work' group**

On the other hand, the group of lone parents who did not see themselves returning to work tended to:

- be older,
- have older children,
- be suffering from ill-health,
- have low qualifications,
- have little and usually not recent work experience,
- have low levels of receipt of maintenance and

- to give their own ill-health as the main barrier.

In terms of their attitudes, lone parents in the 'never work' group were the most negative about work, with over half disagreeing or disagreeing strongly that work had an inherent value (Lessof et al 2001).

### **The 'work postpone' group**

The group of lone parents who wanted to work, but not yet, was not only the largest, but also the least well defined. They were more likely than lone parents in the other two groups to:

- have a child under five,
- have more than one child,
- be social tenants and
- mention wanting to look after their children as the main barrier.

Work was still valued by this group, with around 40 per cent agreeing or agreeing strongly that work had an inherent value (Lessof 2001).

The findings of qualitative research have added an explanatory dimension to the distance to work concept by linking it to barriers to work. That is, the different studies have all found it useful to place individuals along this continuum<sup>25</sup>. The main feature identified in this research, is that it is that confidence appears to determine the position of a lone parent on the continuum to a large extent (see Woodfield and Finch 1999 and Dawson et al 2000). More specifically, as Dawson et al (2000) argue that lone parents can be divided into four groups according to their stance towards work, their confidence in finding employment and their 'readiness to work'. The latter refers to level of qualification and past work experience. Lewis et al (2000) has divided the group of non-working lone parents not only by their work orientation but also by the type of barriers (personal or labour market related barriers) they face in returning to the labour market. Those facing personal barriers such as ill-health are generally further away than those facing labour market-related barriers. Woodfield and Finch (1999) have suggested a variation on this theme by arguing that all lone parents have stepping-stone strategies for entering (or returning) to work, based on different time spans and that groups can be identified according to these strategies as well as on: past work experience, level of confidence and childcare needs.

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<sup>25</sup> Without seeing the topic guide or the transcripts it is difficult to know whether this is because the respondents saw themselves on this continuum or whether this idea was suggested by the research teams.

However, establishing the relative sizes of the three chosen groups, on the basis of the research, is less straightforward. The questions contain different timescales, that is 'work ready' in the NDLP pilot survey referred to expecting to move into work in the next six months, whereas it encompassed those who saw themselves moving into work in the next twelve months in the NDLP postal survey. Moreover, whilst 'never work' referred in some surveys to work not being an option at all, in others it referred to work 'not being a realistic option in the next three years'. This has led to a substantial difference in the estimated size of each group by survey, for example that the work postpone cohort has varied from three per cent to 44 per cent, thus making any comparison across surveys difficult. However, despite all these qualifications, taking each survey by itself, it is still apparent that the work postpone group is by far the largest whichever way it is defined. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 show the different percentages and definitions produced by the respective surveys for the work postpone and the never work group.

**Figure 3.4: Size of work postpone group as part of overall sample in different surveys**

	Proportion	Definition of group
Survey		
Bradshaw and Millar	63 per cent	Those not working any hours who did not want to start seeking work straightway. The category 'later' did not refer to any timescales. Instead, the respondents were asked later when they would like to start working and the majority of those who wanted to defer work (39 per cent) saw themselves moving to work between two and five years from now (Bradshaw and Millar 1991; 44 and 44)
PRILIF (1994)	42 per cent	Not looking for work but wanting to work in the future Finlayson and Marsh 1998 page
NDLP pilot (1998)	42 per cent	Those not working or looking for work but who want to work 'in the future' as opposed to now (Hales et al 2000b; 74)
FACS (2001)	78 per cent	Those not working any hours, not looking at the moment but who do expect to look for work 'sometime in the future' (Kaspraova et al 2003; 47)
NDLP postal survey (2000/01)	46 per cent	Includes three categories, those hoping to work in the next 6 –12 months (18 per cent), those hoping to work in the next 12-36 months (24 per cent) and those hoping to working within the next three years, but who are not sure when that is going to be (3 per cent) (Lessof et al 2001; 41).
ONE	33 per cent next 7 – 24 months and 23 per cent 'at some time but not in the next two years'	All lone parents not in work or looking for work (Green et al 2000 , 101)

Until recently, the figure that 90 per cent of lone parents would like to move into work has been quoted often by both the government and lobby groups in the quest for enabling more parents to move into employment. However, figure 3.5 presents a more complex picture, as this figure varies from three per cent to 44 per cent. Again,



this highlights the lack of comparability of the figures due to the differences in definitions.

**Figure 3.5: Size of never work group in different surveys**

	Proportion	Definition
Survey		
Bradshaw and Millar	6 per cent	Never wanting a job (Bradshaw and Millar 1991; 42)
PRILIF (1994)	15 per cent	Not expecting to go to work (Finlayson and Marsh 1998)
NDLP pilot survey (1998)	9 per cent	Not seeking work and never want to work (Hales et al 2000b; 74)
FACS (2001)	13 per cent	Does not know when will look or does not expect to look (Kasparova et al 2003; 47)
NDLP postal survey (2000/2001)	44 per cent	Work is not an option in the next three years (Lessof et al 2001; 41)
ONE	3 per cent	Not expecting to look for work again (Green et al 2000 101)

In other words, across the surveys it is impossible to find agreement on the size of the different groups. This could in part be due to the differences in question wording and the categorisation of the answers. First, regarding the question wording, figure 3.6 shows the questions for the different surveys. Some questions refer to the timescale for looking for a job, whereas others ask about the timescale for getting a job, which would appear to be quite different as the latter is an outcome influenced by a range of factors such as employment being available, rather than an activity such as job search.

**Figure 3.6: Question wording on distance from work**

	Question wording	Reference
<b>Survey</b>		
Bradshaw and Millar	Employment intentions, whether they wanted to work and if so when	Bradshaw and Millar 1991; 42
PRILIF	Where respondents expect to be in two year's time	McKay and Marsh 1993; 20
FACS	When respondents expect to look for work	Kasparaova et al 2003; 46
NDLP postal survey	When hoping to start work	Lessof et al 200; 41
NDLP pilot survey	Whether seeking work and when they would like to work	Hales et al 2000b; 74
ONE survey	Expecting to look for a job	Green et al 2000, 99

In sum, examining the quantitative data has demonstrated that there are different groups of non-working lone parents. However, only the 'never work' group is homogeneous enough to count as a group and the 'work postpone' group has emerged as the least well defined. Given that this is by far the biggest group, this presents a problem with regards to using this concept to divide up the non-working group.

Stewart (2008) analyses PRILIF data focusing on new lone parents and their employment decisions. She argues that returning to work and staying in work is not so much determined by how quickly mothers return to work then by what she refers to as 'good prospect', i.e. someone who is an owner occupier and has a relatively good starting salary. Wage progression once in work seems to be mainly driven by the level of qualifications and to a certain extent employment sector.

What the research so far has not established is whether individuals are moving along the continuum stepwise or whether they can also jump or even skip a stage, e.g. when unexpectedly hearing about a job. Marsh (2001) has argued that the decision

to go to work is often a sudden rather than a gradual process. Holtermann et al (1997) has suggested that

‘behind these expressions of intentions and preferences lie a complex of attitudes towards parenting and employment, social norms within the community within which the lone parents are located, and of expectations about the impact of work on their family life and the lives of their children’ (p. 83).

### ***3.7 Summary of government sponsored research to date***

As outlined in this chapter, three main approaches have been applied to researching lone parents not in employment, namely a focus on characteristics, barriers and ‘distance to work’. The work around characteristics and how they differ between lone parents in and out of work has been the most successful approach and has produced consistent results. The same does not hold for the other two approaches which have suffered from the lack of theoretical underpinning, inconsistent question wording and in the case of ‘distance to work’ an incomplete typology. Moreover, it has been strongly argued that the care responsibilities cannot be separated from any decisions about going into work for lone parents and that therefore the focus on barriers and distance to work rather than to combining work and care do not capture the complexity of lone parents’ lives and decision-making. A recent review of existing research by the Department for Work and Pensions led to changes in the questionnaire for the main survey of families with children (FACS) and future analysis will show to what extent this has been successful in disentangling some of that complexity. The new question are influenced by psychological approaches focussing on the attitudes of mothers and the influence of their family and friends in terms of their expectations based on work by Fishbein and Aizen (see Collins et al 2006) but have left out that what friends and families do and did when themselves parents, which also be an important factors as suggested by Duncan and Edwards (1999). With regards to the ‘distance to work’ concept, it seems to capture lone parents who are either very close or very far away from the labour market but not the biggest group of lone parents in between in terms of their characteristics, barriers and movements towards work.

In summary then, a vast number of surveys and qualitative research has been commissioned by the respective Labour administrations to shed light on the issues

around lone parents and non-employment. While some progress has been made, overall the results are falling short of helping to explain complexities behind decisions to move into work or not or to estimate the 'distance to work' of lone parents. This lack in additional knowledge having been gained after a intensive period of research is largely due to much of the research duplicating previous studies rather than building on them as well as due to a lack of theoretical foundation of much of the research. Some of the effects of these shortcomings will show up again in the next chapter when trying to assess the likely performance of the current welfare-to-work reform.

## ***CHAPTER 4: Evidence-based policy appraisal***

In the previous chapter, the evidence base on lone parents and non-employment and lone parents has been discussed. This chapter will commence with an exploration of the meaning of and tensions within evidence-based-policy-making in section 4.1 before moving on discussing the guidance published in the Green Book (HMTreasury 2003) on how to appraise policy designs in section 4.2. Section 4.3 will set out the alternative way of appraising the current welfare-to work reform that is going to be followed in this thesis, including how alternatives to the current designs are set out in section 4.4. The policy appraisal carried out in this thesis is based on secondary analysis of the Families and Children Study (section 4.5) and this is followed by a summary of this chapter (section 4.6).

### ***4.1 Evidence-based-policy-making***

The rallying call in the White Paper *Modernising Government* is worth repeating here:

‘this government expects more of policy-makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long-term goals’  
(Cm 4310 1999, chapter 2, para 6).

More specifically, this means ‘developing a new and more creative approach to policy-making based on the following key principles:

- Designing policy around shared goals and carefully defined results, not around organisational structures or existing functions.
- Making sure policies are inclusive...
- Involving others in policy making...
- Becoming more forward- and outward-looking.
- Learning from experience.’

(White Paper *Modernising Government* Cm 4310 (1999), chapter 2, para 6).

Definitions and interpretations of evidence-based-policy vary both in terms of what constitutes evidence and what role it is playing in the policy-making process. Starting with a definition, the first task is to distinguish between research and evidence. Research has been defined as ‘a search or investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful consideration or study of a subject; a course of critical or scientific inquiry’ (OED), whereas evidence has been defined as ‘the available body or facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid’ (OED). In other words, research is a directed and systematic inquiry leading to the discovery of new knowledge, whilst evidence is the instrumentalisation of research findings to support an argument or belief.

The role evidence is, can or should be playing in policy-making has long been disputed. It has been argued that evidence-based-policy-making fits well with the rational model of policy-making (see Sanderson 2002 and Bulmer 1982 among others). The rational policy model uses evidence as the basis for decision-making and goes through five steps, these being: defining the problem based on available evidence, defining the aims of the policy, establishing the potential policy options, assessing the impacts of those different solutions and, finally, choosing the option which matches the policy goals most closely (Bulmer 1987). The rationalist policy model is contentious as is the interpretation of evidence-based-policy-making by the respective Labour governments. Starting with the latter, the focus of the incoming Labour government in 1997 on service delivery, more specifically on ‘what works’, was based on an anti-ideological stance (Solesbury 2001 and Sanderson 2002). It was whilst preparing the first Comprehensive Spending Review in 1998 that ‘the many gaps in existing knowledge about “what works” became apparent (Nutley and Webb 2000, p. 20) and this then led to the Modernising Government White Paper quoted above being drawn up. The focus on ‘what works’ has meant the interpretation of desirable evidence falls into two groups: the use of indicators for monitoring to improve accountability and piloting and evaluations to lead to ‘improvement through more effective policies and programmes’ (Sanderson 2002, p. 3). Thus, the increase in the number of evaluations has been the ‘most marked feature of the late 1990s’ (Walker 2001). A number of problems with this approach have been highlighted, namely that it: neglects looking into the actual problem in more depth, tends to be atheoretical, focuses on quantitative methods (all in Sanderson 2002) and has mainly piloted rather than tested policy initiatives (Walker 2001 and Sanderson 2002).

When focussing on progress and whether a policy initiative has worked, issues of measurement and causality are crucial. The focus on measuring progress has led to a predominance of quantitative data (Sanderson 2002). However, theoretical approaches are essential when trying to determine causality rather than simply trying to isolate effects and establishing counterfactuals (Sanderson 2002, see also Parsons and Tilley 1995). In addition, the focus on 'what works' has meant that policy-makers and researchers have focussed too much on ex-post evaluations, thereby neglecting the transferable lessons from: generic policy instruments, other countries and theories of human behaviour (Solesbury 2001). Moreover, the question 'what works' should be extended to 'what works for whom in what circumstances' (Solesbury 2001; 8), which means that evidence-based-policy-making needs to move away from focussing on evaluations and towards including other forms of analysis, in order to be relevant at all stages of the policy cycle.

Furthermore, the current form of evidence-based-policy-making in social policy has been shaped by the interpretation and use of evidence for policy, initially in medicine and later in education and social work (Solesbury 2001), as seen for example in the role and practices of institutions such as the Cochrane Foundation and the National Institute of Clinical Excellence. The main difference between the application of evidence-based policy and practice in fields such as education and social work in contrast to that of work activation policies, is the involvement of professionals who are likely to filter the available evidence and use their own judgment with regards to individual cases and scenarios. While there is some debate about the role that the judgement of professionals should play (Hammersley 2005 and Chalmers 2003), such professionals do not exist in social policy arenas or at least, do not have the same standing. Taking welfare reform for lone parents as an example, the following question arises: is the role of a personal advisor that of an administrator of existing policies or that of an expert who can decide which lone parents are able to work and which are not? The implications of these different approaches will be discussed in more detail below in chapter six.

The focus on particular types of research to inform policy is problematic. In order to justify its use, evidence needs to be available, complete and unanimous in terms of the policy choices and this is often not the case (among others see Finch 1986 with particular reference to the contribution of qualitative research). This point is taken further in the postmodernist critique of evidence-based-policy-making. Proponents of this view argue that evidence-based-policy-making is necessarily based on a

positivist view of the world where it is assumed that the answers to problems and even problems themselves can be reliably measured, rather than being context dependent. Within postmodernism the argument is made that language does not have fixed meanings, insisting that instead of a common perception of the world and therefore particular problems, evidence or any truth, many specific local perceptions and hence different truths exist, which renders the notion of evidence impossible (see Adams 2001). However, it has since been argued that it is precisely because of the increasing complexity of the modern world that research is needed to describe and explain the changes (Sanderson 2002 among others).

Finally, there is the question regarding the level of influence that evidence has on policy decisions, i.e. whether the rationalist policy model can accurately reflect the process. Proponents of this position have argued that evidence does not play a central role in policy-making and that other influences and pressures are likely to determine eventual decisions, at least in part, such as the existence of pressure groups and other demands on the government. In line with this view, a number of authors have put forward alternative models, such as the 'bounded rationality model', which suggests that policy-makers do not and cannot take all available evidence into account (Simon 1957), the 'disjointed incrementalism model' by Lindblom (1959), also often referred to as the 'science of muddling through' (Dror 1964), the 'mixed scanning approach' by Etzioni (1967), who argued that evidence should play a leading role in fundamental decisions, but less so in minor policy decisions and finally, the 'garbage can' model (Cohen 1972 and March and Olsen 1976), where problems and solutions become entangled and dumped together in the said garbage can (all in Nutley and Webb 2000).

Bulmer (1982) distinguished between the 'engineering' and the 'enlightenment model' of policy-making. The engineering model is similar to the rational model, in that the relationship between policy and research are essentially linear and the latter is the main factor shaping policy solutions. In the enlightenment model on the other hand, research contributes towards informing policy-makers and the decisions taken, but is only one of many factors. The latter model is seen as a more accurate description of the role of research by many involved in carrying out applied research (see GSRU 2007c, Finch 1986 and Sanderson 2002 among others).



## **4.2 Appraising policies according to the Green Book**

The White Paper *Modernising Government* talks specifically about improving the design of policies (Cm 4310 1999). Within government departments, informing policy at the design stage has tended to be the responsibility of economists and statisticians, rather than social researchers (GSRU 2007). Therefore, the focus of analysis at the policy design stage is very much on financial aspects of policies both in terms of cost benefit calculations of different policy options as well as proportion and numbers of winners and losers created by policies. The majority of social research commissioned by the government has focused on implementation and outcomes rather than policy design. This lack of input from social researchers at the design stage has been recognised as problematic by the Government Social Research Unit (GSRU 2007). Some of the reasons for the lack of social research application at the policy design stage are linked to the difficulty of operationalising hypothetical policy options, issues around the validity of hypothetical research and the timescales involved in large scale research projects. The current emphasis on systematic reviews can be seen as an attempt to inform policy at the design stage from the social research perspective (Tripney et al 2009, White 2009 and Magenta Book 2008). Primarily then, social research has focused on evaluating the implementation and outcomes of policies based on what has become the core question for government policy evaluations: does it work, for whom and why.

As mentioned above, economists have traditionally been involved in the policy design stage within government. The Green Book, published in 2003 by the Treasury, contains the official guidance for economists on how to carry out policy appraisals<sup>26</sup>. According to the Green Book (HMTreasury 2003) carrying out a policy appraisal involves the following four stages:

1. justifying action
2. setting objectives
3. appraising options
4. making recommendations

The focus of this thesis is not to discuss the justifications for the welfare-to-work reform nor whether its aims are appropriate for two main reasons: Firstly, while the current welfare-to-work reform is controversial, it seems that the direction of travel is

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<sup>26</sup> The Green Book uses the term appraisal for ex-ante assessment as it is build in part on projections and 'evaluation' for ex-post assessments of policies as they are using actual data.

towards further activation rather than any alternatives approaches. In other words, while it has been argued that it would be more efficient both in terms of outcomes and costs to focus on existing policies such as employment retention, particularly in this difficult economic climate (HC41-1 2008), this is unlikely to happen even with a change of government. Secondly, Powell argues that intrinsic evaluations, i.e. 'measuring government's success on its own terms' (2002; p.4) as part of the democratic process of the accountability of governments and as such useful<sup>27</sup>.

Instead then, the focus of this thesis is on whether the chosen policy design is likely to achieve its objectives and how the current design compares to alternatives in place in other countries. In other words, it addresses points three and four of the Green Book: appraising options and making recommendations. Prior to appraising different options these need to be identified first. Regarding the development of options, the Green Book makes the following suggestions:

- 'Research existing reports, and consult widely with practitioners and experts, to gather the set of data and information relevant to the objectives and scope of the problem,
  - Analyse the data to understand significant dependencies, priorities, incentives and other drivers,
  - From the research, identify best practice solutions, including international examples, if appropriate,
  - Consider the full range of issues likely to affect the objective,
  - Identify the full range of policy instruments or projects that may be used to meet the objectives. This may span different sorts or scales of intervention; regulatory (or deregulatory) solutions may be compared with self-regulation, spending or tax options and
  - Develop and consider radical options ...' including doing nothing'
- (HM Treasury 2003; pp. 17 – 18)

In other words, the Green Book (HM Treasury 2003) recommends basing the development of policy options on a review of the available literature, data analysis, stakeholder consultations and identification of lessons from other policies, e.g. in other countries. Given that the current welfare-to-work reform under discussion in

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<sup>27</sup> Powell (2002) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic evaluation. The latter is using objectives set by the evaluators that are different to those set by the government. One benefit of intrinsic evaluations is the possibility evaluating policies across countries or time as well as taking into account potential opportunity costs of policies.

this thesis has been subject to a number of consultations and has formed a substantial part of the recent inquiry by the Department for Work and Pensions Committee on the employment strategy of the government (HC42-1 2008), the views of stakeholders are well documented and there is no need for further investigation by means of carrying out expert interviews as part of this study.

The methods suggested in the Green Book (HM Treasury 2003) to appraise the policy options is to carry out cost-benefit and cost effectiveness analyses:: 'Following the identification and description of all costs, benefits and risks,..., the best option should be selected. Judgement over and above the component parts of the analysis is always called for in making decisions. Once an option has been selected, it will need to be refined into a solution. Consultation is important at this stage .... in making judgements between monetised and non-monetised effects' (HMTreasury 2003; pp. 37-38). In other words, the guidance distinguishes between the 'best option' and the 'solution'. Furthermore, it acknowledges that cost-benefit analysis is not sufficient by itself as not all factors can be turned in monetary figures. Reaching the 'solution' should be based on a combination of cost-benefit analysis, judgement and consultation. Finally, 'the best option is unlikely to be mutually exclusive, so it is useful to review the other options to see if their good parts can be grafted onto the leading option' (HMTreasury 2003; p. 40).

As discussed above the Green Book recommends the use of cost benefit analysis to appraise the policy options. However, before such a cost benefit can be applied more fundamental questions about the likely success of the reform have to be answered in the positive. More specifically, the policy design should pass the evaluation-mantra-test of whether something works, why and for whom. Given that my analysis in this thesis is set up as an intrinsic appraisal, the objectives against which the success of the selection criteria of the welfare-to-work reform is measured are the objectives stated by the current government of meeting the employment target as a key vehicle to meet child poverty target. My analysis of this question has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with whether the reform is likely to work and the second with the question regarding for whom it is likely to work. In terms of examining whether the reform is likely to work a number of alternative approaches are compared, as set out in the next section below.

### ***4.3 Appraising the selection criterion for work activation of lone parents of the current welfare-to-work reform***

The policy appraisal of the different approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation in this thesis will attempt answers to two aspects of the question 'what works': The first part is to investigate the potential of the reform and the second part is to examine the likelihood of a substantial proportion moving into work as a result of the targeting by age of child. In order to assess the potential impact that targeting this group could have, three hypothetical scenarios are examined. First of all, there is what could be called the **best case scenario**, that is what would be the effect on the overall employment rate of lone parents if the activation was completely successful and 100 per cent of the target group moved into employment. Perhaps more realistically, a second hypothetical scenario is focusing on the employment target. In other words, what proportion of lone parents in the target group would need to move into employment for the overall employment target to be met? This will be referred to as the **employment target scenario**. Finally, as discussed above, the employment target is seen as a policy lever used to meet the child poverty target. Harker et al estimated that the overall employment rate of lone parents would have to rise to 86 per cent in order for the child poverty target to be met all else being equal (2006; 13)<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, the **child poverty target scenario** will examine what proportion of the target group would need to move into employment for the overall employment rate to increase to 86 per cent.

Estimating the likely as opposed to the potential success of the reform is more difficult. However, one indicator is the steady-state employment rate, i.e. the employment rate of lone parents in previous years. Therefore, I will be looking at the employment rate of all lone parents and that of the activation target group in particular from 2002 to 2005 onwards. The development of the employment rate over these four years will then be projected forward in order to estimate the employment rate of lone parents if the reform either had not been introduced or did not have any effects. This scenario will be referred to as the **counterfactual or steady-state scenario** and give an indication of the likely future development of the lone parent employment rate if no substantial changes were to take place in the next few years.

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<sup>28</sup> Alternatively, if the employment target of 70 per cent was met for lone parents by 2010, then the proportion of dual earner couples would need to rise from 57 to 65 per cent and the proportion of unemployed couples fall from 5 to 4 per cent (Harker 2006; 13). The 86 per cent figure is used for illustration purposes as increasing the employment rate of lone parents is not the only policy lever the government can and is using to meet the child poverty target.

Further to the examination of the likely success of the design of the current welfare-to-work reform the characteristics of lone parents in and out of work will be compared. The differences in certain characteristics between those two groups have emerged as a key feature in government sponsored research on lone parents and non-employment (see chapter three for a fuller discussion of this literature). Over time, a number of characteristics such as the number of children, health status and recent work experience, have been shown to be associated with not being in employment. The government argues that lone parents with older children are generally 'able to work'. Thus, one would expect the two groups to be similar across other characteristics affecting whether a lone parents is in work or not.

Having identified the relevant characteristics as stand alone factors, the number of lone parents facing multiple disadvantages, when it comes to moving into employment will be examined. Berthoud (2003a) has investigated the concept of multiple barriers, with regards to the likelihood of labour market entry and found that a cumulative model is the best predictor for labour market entry, i.e. taking into account both the number of barriers, as well as the effect of certain combinations of these. Berthoud (2003a) focused on the following disadvantages: when comparing the effect of multiple disadvantages on the three groups studied in his analysis (disabled people, people over 50 and lone parents):

- Age,
- family structure,
- skill level,
- ethnic group,
- labour demand and
- health status.

According to Berthoud (2003a) even a straightforward additive model of multiple disadvantages is almost as good at predicting the risk of non-employment as more sophisticated models combining particular disadvantages. Therefore, such an additive model is applied in this thesis. For the analysis of the effect of multiple disadvantages on the labour market entry of lone parents over time, Berthoud (2003a) only used personal factors such as age or health for his model rather than the full list above.

The list of multiple disadvantages used in this thesis is a combination of the original list used by Berthoud (2003a) and the key characteristics associated with not being

in work as highlighted by existing research on lone parents. Three factors on Berthoud's list have been either taken out or replaced. The first, and most obvious, is that of family status as the current analysis is focusing on one family status, namely that of lone parenthood. Also, ethnicity does not affect the likelihood of a lone parent to be in employment in the same way it does for the rest of the working age population: given the small sample size numbers, all minority ethnic groups would have to be treated as one. Yet, the employment rate of Afro-Caribbean lone parents is higher than that of White lone parents while that of most other minority ethnic groups is lower substantially. Therefore, ethnicity has been taken out of the analysis. Finally, the age of individuals has been left out of the analysis because the age of the lone parent tends to be linked to that of the child and most of the policy approaches use the age of a child as part of their selection mechanism.

In contrast, skills, health status and labour demand have been kept and two factors added to the list of multiple disadvantages for this research. Based on the review of the available research carried out in chapter three, recent work experience has been highlighted as enhancing the employability of an individual, particularly in the low skilled sector. Therefore, time spent on Income Support has been included in the list. Similarly, having three or more children is frequently mentioned as a characteristic associated with not being in work and has therefore been included as well.

Hence, the five factors included in the list of multiple disadvantages are:

- Having three or more children,
- Not having any qualifications,
- Having been on Income Support for six or more years<sup>29</sup>,
- Either the lone parent or at least one child to have an impairment that is expected to last for at least a year and limits either the amount or kind of work the parent can engage in and
- Living in the government region with the lowest employment rate.

Other characteristics associated with non-employment have not been included for a number of reasons. Being a social tenant is not in the list used as it applies to around two thirds of lone parents on Income Support and is therefore not suitable for making

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<sup>29</sup> Ideally this characteristic would also account for lone parents never having been in work as it is otherwise biased towards older lone parents. However, currently this variable is not available in the earlier datasets (2002 to 2004). Therefore, it has been left out of the 2005 analysis as well in order to be able to compare across the different waves.

distinctions within that group. Marital status has not been included in the analysis either as the variable available in FACS does not isolate cohabitation. Therefore, 'single' lone parents were either single when giving birth to their child or has previously been cohabitating. In addition to the problems mentioned with both tenure and marital status, the direct effect of either on the likelihood of being in work is less clear than with characteristics such as health and qualifications. Both marital status and tenure seem to refer to socio-economic circumstances prior to becoming a lone parent and associated with that aspect social capital not captured in FACS. As has been discussed in the previous chapter further questions regarding work orientation have been added in the more recent waves of FACS, however, they are not available for analysis at this stage.

In sum, a list of multiple disadvantages has been applied in this context for three reasons: Firstly, the list of multiple disadvantages is used as a way to summarise the differences in characteristics between those on Income Support and those in work. Moreover, it can be used to differentiate within the welfare reform target group by their likelihood of moving into work. Finally, the distribution of multiple disadvantages can then also be used to compare the distribution of multiple disadvantages across the different target groups as an indicator of 'ability to work'.

#### ***4.4 Identifying alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation***

The recommendation in the Green Book to investigate policy approaches in other countries as part of the appraisal of any policy design is building on a long tradition of policy learning and transfer between countries (for example, Casey 2009). Policy learning is usually motivated by the perception of a 'common problem' and a similar approach more generally (among others Dwyer and Ellison 2009). Rose (1991; 3) argues that the 'process of lesson drawing starts with scanning programmes in effect elsewhere, and ends with the prospective evaluation of what would happen if a programme already in effect elsewhere were transferred here in the future'. There are a number of constraints of the transfer of policies such as the 'policy complexity, past policy, structural and institutional feasibility and language' (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996) but also cultural orientation as is exemplified in the level of policy transfer from the United States to the UK in the past couple of decades (Dwyer and Ellison 2009,

Daguerre 2004 and Annesley 2003). Rose (1991; 22) suggests that there are five ways of lesson learning: 'copying, emulation, hybridization, synthesis and inspiration'. In this instance, examples from other countries are used as 'inspiration', which Rose defines as 'programmes used elsewhere used as intellectual stimulus for developing a novel programme'. The main purpose of the policy alternatives identified in chapter six is to provide a comparison to the design adopted in the welfare-to-work reform rather than to be policy options in themselves. The latter is not envisaged in this design not least because it would require a thorough and comprehensive analysis of not only the specific part of the policy that is examined here but the wider policy, institutional and demographic context. Analysing examples of policy transfer failures, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) argue that this occurs when transfers are either 'uninformed, incomplete or inappropriate'. Chapter six aims to contextualise different policy approaches and not to assess their suitability for a potential policy transfer. In other words, the alternative approaches are used to cast into relief the suitability of the current design.

The third part of the PhD focuses on alternatives to the UK's current approach to targeting in welfare to work reform, which is based on the selection criterion of age of youngest child. The aims of looking at alternative approaches in this thesis, i.e. the fourth part, are twofold: Firstly, to identify the range of alternatives that have been implemented in other countries and secondly, to examine whether the groups selected to be available for work under these alternative schemes are in practice likely to be able to work, through mapping the different approaches onto the British context using FACS. This part of the analysis is carried out in three steps: The first step is to identify different approaches based on a review of existing policies in other countries. Based on this I select one country case study to illustrate each different approach to show how the policy operates in that specific context (chapter six). Finally, the size and composition of the groups targeted by the different approaches if mapped on the British context is compared to the current reform (chapter seven).

With regards to the strengths and weaknesses of the approach taken to identify alternative approaches, the following points should be made. The strength of this approach is that it looks across a wide range of countries and identifies conceptually different approaches as well as variations within those approaches and therefore provides a solid basis from which to choose the case studies later on. One drawback of focusing on the policy design is that it does not take into account variations in the administration of those approaches. However, this would be difficult to establish



given the lack of up-to-date and detailed literature on this aspect in many of the countries covered here. Nor was it possible to explore whether activation means full availability to work or whether a staggered approach is being taken, e.g. starting with requirements to carry out work-related activities. Thus the discussion (and table 6.1 in particular) focuses on a comparison of one key aspect of activation policies, namely the approach to selecting a particular group of lone parents for work activation in terms of the underlying rationale and actual criteria.

The selection criterion for lone parents in the current welfare-to-work reform is based on the age of the youngest child. As has been discussed in chapters two and three, this seems to be based on notions of child development and the role of maternal employment at different points in time. As a first step this approach will be appraised to answer the question of whether it would work and if so, for whom. However, as also discussed in the chapter two, there has been some criticism of taking age of child as the main selection criterion because it does not necessarily reflect the reality and complexity of lone parents' lives and because the service infrastructure, particularly with regards to childcare, is not in place. Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the belief that the age of the youngest child can be equated with 'ability to work' as it disregards the wider circumstances of lone parents, especially if activation and therefore 'ability to work' is meant to identify ability to obtain a job. To what extent 'ability to work' as defined by the current government and 'ability to compete in the labour market' overlap is one of the facets explored in this policy appraisal.

The guidance in the Green Book also suggests looking at other countries for examples of innovative and best practice. Therefore, the international policy review in chapter six focuses on identifying alternative ways of selecting lone parents for work activation. In order to illustrate how the different approaches operate in practice, country case studies are chosen for each different approach. The two main criteria for choosing the case studies are relatively recent welfare-to-work reforms and whether the country performs well against the objectives of the reform. The latter criterion is intended to identify best practice in terms of the employment and child poverty rates in those countries. However, as acknowledged elsewhere the lone parent employment and child poverty outcomes are determined by a whole range of policies and other factors and not solely or even predominantly by a particular work activation approach. Nevertheless, by choosing countries, which have carried out an activation reform in the past 20 years, it is hoped that subsequent changes in

employment rates can be linked to those activation reforms. This presupposes that extensive evaluations have been carried out and that these are available in English and, as will be seen in the international policy review in chapter six, this is not necessarily the case.

Based on the international review, six different approaches to selecting lone parents are identified. Three of these approaches will then be mapped onto the British case using data from the Families and Children Study. The same appraisal criteria will be applied to the alternative approaches as to the current reform in order to compare how the alternative approaches would work in terms of progress towards the lone parent employment and the child poverty target. The appraisal will be carried out using secondary analysis of the FACS data. Both the data set and the benefits and limitations of the approach will be discussed in the following section.

#### ***4.5 Carrying out secondary analysis using the Families and Children Study***

After having identified six different types of approaches to activating lone parents my analysis will compare the range of options based on the national and international review as well as the 'doing-nothing' option against the actual design of the forthcoming reform.

The key outcome criterion used for measuring the different policy options is their potential to increase the employment rate of lone parents. Therefore, after having developed the different models on the basis of a comparative policy analysis and discussed their success or otherwise in doing so in the respective countries, I apply them to the British case through carrying out secondary analysis of existing survey data. Doing secondary analysis, particularly for a PhD thesis, has a range of advantages such as being able to analyse a large scale, high quality data set that allows for sub-group analysis. Moreover, many of the large scale surveys have been designed and tested by experts and the data has been collected by trained interviewers (Dale et al 1988 and Bryman 2004). Secondary analysis is therefore a very time and cost effective way of obtaining data without having to compromise on the quality of the data (Dale et al 1988 and Bryman 2004). Moreover as discussed in chapter three, there are a large number of empirical studies around lone parents and non-employment including both quantitative and qualitative studies, and therefore

there are a number of data sets available for secondary analysis. Finally, secondary analysis minimises the burden and intrusion on respondents as it avoids collecting new data (SRA 2002). The main disadvantage of carrying out secondary analysis is that the original survey usually does not focus entirely on the aspects that are of current interest (Bryman 2004) and thus the data does not include questions on all of the relevant issues.

Analysing existing data does not raise many ethical issues on the whole and it is therefore barely mentioned in the main ethics guides (SRA 2002 and BSA 2002). Most ethical issues occur around data collection and storage rather than at the secondary analysis stage, but some of the issues encountered at the earlier stages will have to be taken into account (Dale et al 1988). With regards to using FACS, the main issues occurring at the data collection stage include the sampling framework, the opt-out procedure used to recruit participants and the potential effect of the commissioner on participation and accurate reporting. These will be discussed below.

As outlined below, the sampling frame for FACS is the child benefit administrative database held by the Department for Work and Pensions. The recipients of this benefit give out their contact details to obtain a benefit payment and not because they necessarily want to take part in a survey. The Department for Work and Pensions therefore restricts the access to the Child Benefit sample to their own research on the whole. Linked to this is the opt-out approach used in most surveys where child benefit recipients receive a letter and where it is assumed that they want to participate unless they get in touch to say otherwise. However, the case has been made that an opt-in procedure where a respondent would only be contacted for the actual survey, if he/she actively consented to take part, is more ethical. However, adopting an opt-in approach is likely to lead to much lower response rate which would in turn affect the quality of the data and it is therefore not used for many surveys at present.

Another issue is that of the role of the commissioner with regards to participation and data collection. As the first letter informing someone that they have been selected for the survey is sent by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) this may make some people feel more compelled to take part, e.g. as they may think this could affect their benefit entitlement. Similarly, the involvement of DWP may also have an effect on the data collection as respondents may not feel comfortable to (fully) report

that they are working on Income Support or have started seeing a new partner if they are lone parents as they may think that the department may be alerted to it. This could be the case where someone is knowingly going against the rules as well as where the behaviour is legitimate but where the respondents are not sure about the rules. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect some under-reporting with regards to the number of hours, the money earned while on Income Support and partners living with 'lone' parents. A more general issue for all secondary analysis is that of informed consent. It is difficult to explain all the possible uses of a survey to the respondent and also not possible to assure them that the data will be used for purposes that are in their interest or they agree with (see Dale et al 1988 and Phillips et al 2002).

As previously mentioned, the secondary data analysis in this thesis is based on the Families and Children Study (FACS)<sup>30</sup>. FACS started in 1999 as a baseline survey for low and middle income families and was then called Survey of Low and Middle Income Families (SOLIF). It is both a longitudinal survey, i.e. respondents get interviewed every year, as well as a cross-sectional survey, i.e. respondents are added each year so that the survey is representative of all families with dependent children in Britain at that time. Since 2001 high income families have been included in FACS, so that the survey is now representative of all families with dependent children in Great Britain. The Department for Work and Pensions is the commissioning and lead department for this survey. A range of other departments are involved in FACS such as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department for Families, Children and Schools and the Department for Transport. So far, data from seven waves, i.e. from 1999 to 2005, is available. Data collection for waves eight and nine of FACS (2006 and 2007) has been carried out and reports have been published using wave eight but the data are not available as yet<sup>31</sup>.

A key aim of FACS is to examine whether the policy package aiming to help parents move into work is having an effect in terms of employment rates, living standards and child poverty. In addition, the data are used to monitor changes in the composition

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<sup>30</sup> This research is based on data from the Families and Children Study 2002 to 2005 (SN4427). The data has been collected by the National Centre for Social Research. It is sponsored by the following government departments: Department for Work and Pensions (lead department), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Transport. The data has been supplied by the Data Archive and are Crown copyright.

<sup>31</sup> The data from wave eight (2006) has not been released to the data archive yet and there are no plans for a release in the near future (personal communication with Robert Lilli at the Department for Work and Pensions).

and financial situation of families in Great Britain more generally. The sample is drawn from Child Benefit records and the study currently contains now about 7.500 families with around 13.000 dependent children. The fieldwork and data collection for FACS was carried by the Policy Studies Centre together with the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) for the first two waves and since then only by NatCen. Potential respondents who have been selected for the survey are contacted by letter by the Department for Work and Pensions and have the chance to opt-out of the survey. The data is collected through face-to-face interviews using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)<sup>32</sup>.

The surveys itself consists of three different samples, the panel and the booster sample to ensure representativeness and the re-screened sample of previous survey participants. The overall response rate was found to be 84 per cent (Hoxhallari 2007, p. 12) though not all families were eligible<sup>33</sup>, so the overall response rate of eligible families was 76 per cent (based on Hoxhallari 2007)<sup>34</sup>. While potential non-response bias affects all surveys, the problem of attrition is particular to panel surveys. The attrition pattern since the first wave follows the usual pattern with the highest attrition rate between the first and the second wave of around 22 per cent and then falling to around ten per cent between each of the subsequent years (Lyon et al 2007, p. 31). By wave seven, 46 per cent of the original sample are still in the current sample (Lyon et al 2007, p.31). The data are stored at the National Data Archive and available free of charge to the academic community. NatCen publishes a technical report for each wave (e.g. Lyon et al 2007). It also runs a website for participants in the survey, which contains links about publications using FACS data and the teams sends out Christmas cards and an annual newsletter giving the main findings from the study to all participants.

There are two principal alternatives to using FACS, namely, the Programme for Research into Low Income Families (PRILIF) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS). PRILIF, arguably the predecessor of FACS, is a panel survey of lone parents who

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<sup>32</sup> Using CAPI allows for more complex routing within the questionnaire as well as for data quality and consistency checks. In this context using CAPI means that basic information about the respondent and the household composition from the previous interview can be retrieved and any changes in the personal or household circumstances recorded.

<sup>33</sup> It is estimated that 3.5 per cent of the sample age out of the survey each year, i.e. their youngest is no longer counted as a dependent child for benefit purposes (McKay 2003 in Lyon et al 2007).

<sup>34</sup> The productive interview rates varied for each sample and were 87 per cent for the panel, 65 per cent for the booster sample and 57 per cent for the re-screened sample (Lyon et al 2007, p 30, table 5.3).

were interviewed at several points in time between 1991 and 2001. While it is a rich dataset that traces lone parents over ten years, interviews were carried out only every couple of years, which makes capturing movements towards work more difficult than using FACS. Moreover, the starting point of the data set is now over 15 years ago and it stopped in 2001.

The Labour Force Survey is run by National Statistics and has a sample of 60,000 households in Britain (ONS 2009b). A smaller sample is interviewed every three months, allowing comparisons over the 15 month period. Therefore, the LFS data can be used very effectively to map job retention as demonstrated by Evans et al (2004). However, as the aim of LFS is to give an overview of the labour market behaviour of the population as a whole rather than of families with children or just lone parents, more detailed questions pertaining lone parents in particular are not included in the survey (such as the length of separation).

FACS has three main advantages over the other possible data sources: Firstly, due to the sample size and family focus of FACS, the sub-sample of lone parents is sufficiently large in the different waves to allow for the analysis of non-employed lone parents (see below). Secondly, it comprises a combination of cross-sectional and panel data and therefore allows for different types of analysis. Finally, the different waves cover most of the period that New Labour has been in government which means that the effect of the relevant programme changes can be traced using just one data set.

The analysis in this thesis is based on data from wave seven, i.e. 2005. The sample has been prepared by taking out all those lone parents who are either married or retired. There are 1910 lone parents with dependent children according to the child benefit definition in the original 2005 FACS family level. This matches the published figures (Hoxhallari et al 2007, p. 13, table 1.1). Of the initial 1910 lone parents, twelve were married and living with their partner and six were retired. When cross-tabulating the variables for work hours and benefit receipt, it seems that eight lone parents were simultaneously claiming IS currently and working 16 hours or more which would suggest benefit fraud though alternatively it may have been a result of them misunderstanding the survey questions or an overlap in benefit receipt and work entry. In any case, these lone parents are excluded from the analysis as it is not clear whether they should be in the group of lone parents who are working or the group of lone parents who are on Income Support.

Therefore, removing from the analysis out all those lone parents who have provided contradictory answers to key questions such as marital and work status, as well as those who say that they are retired from the analysis leaves an unweighted sample of 1884 lone parents. After applying one of the cross-sectional weights provided with the dataset (grossw) that is provided as part of the dataset, the number of lone parents in the sample stands at 1721. These lone parents are not retired, not married and living with their partner and do not work 16 and more hours and receive IS at the same time. For a detailed comparison of my analysis and published figures as well as an elaboration of the weighting, please refer to appendix 1.

The key analysis variable in this thesis is the employment status of lone parents. As discussed in chapter two, the employment rate has been defined as working one hour or more for the purpose of the employment target. Therefore, all lone parents who are working at least one hour per week will be grouped together as being '**in work**'. Those who are on IS and are not working at all are grouped together as '**on IS**'. The final group is called '**other**' and it includes lone parents who are not working 16 or more hours and not receiving IS either. In other words, they appear to have independent means of support, such as IB or sufficient maintenance payments.

One of the multiple disadvantages Berthoud (2003a) included in his analysis was that of having a health problem. The questions in FACS ask the respondents about their general state of health, whether they have a longstanding health problem or disability and if so, whether they expect this to last for at least a year and whether it affects either the kind or the amount of work they are able to do. In line with the usage in many other surveys, health problem is defined here as having a health problem or impairment that is expected to last for at least a year and that affects either the kind or the amount of work (or both) the respondent is able to do. Concerns have also been raised regarding the ill-health of children in lone parent households and consequently the additional care responsibilities of lone parents. Therefore, lone parents who have at least one child with a health problem or impairment that is expected to last for a least one year and that affects either the kind or the amount of work that a lone parent can do, have also been included in the group of lone parents that have a health disadvantage.

#### ***4.8 Lone parenthood - a gendered issue?***

Finally, a brief comment on lone parents as choice of analytical category: The vast majority of lone parents are women (Philo 2009, p.21, table 2.1) and the gendered nature of the problems around lone motherhood have been highlighted in particular with regards to their poverty levels and labour market position (see among others Millar 1989 and Duncan and Edwards 1997). Thus, a substantial part of the available research has focused on lone mothers only. While all these things are clearly relevant for this study, I have decided to include lone fathers in the analysis, i.e. to analyse the effect of selecting by age of child on all lone parents, for two main reasons. Firstly, lone fathers are included in the employment target of the government and therefore, also on this study and secondly, because lone fathers are too small to include in the analysis, e.g. comparing characteristics such as health and tenure by the age of youngest child. Therefore, I have decided to include all lone parents in this analysis.

#### ***4.9 Summary***

In this thesis, age of child as activation criterion within the current welfare-to-work reform will be appraised in order to answer the key question of evidence-based policy: will it work and if so, for whom and why. The objectives against which potential success will be measured are those identified by the government, namely meeting the employment target as one of the key policy levers to decrease child poverty levels. The first step of the policy appraisal in my thesis is to look at a number of scenarios in terms of the potential contribution that successfully activating a particular target group could make to the various targets. This is followed by a steady-state analysis, i.e. by comparing the employment rates of the target group of lone parents over time. As a third step the composition of lone parents in the target group will be examined in more detail. One of the arguments used to justify the activation is that lone parents with older children are 'able to work'. A comparison of the characteristics and the number of disadvantages between lone parents on Income Support and those in work should give an indication of what proportion of this group is able to work (see chapter five). The same analysis will then be replicated for the policy alternatives (chapter seven). Those policy alternatives will be identified on the basis of an international policy review (chapter six) and mapped onto the British context in chapter seven.



## CHAPTER 5: Examining the likely success of activation policies based on the age of the youngest child

The activation of lone parents in the current welfare-to-work reform is focused on lone parents with older children. On the basis of the indicators for 'ability to work' that have been identified elsewhere, the potential and likely success of basing activation on the age of the youngest child is examined. As mentioned in chapter two, the majority of other countries select lone parents into work-activation based on the age of the youngest child (Carcillo and Grubb 2006) and the cut off point is frequently around the age of three for children.

The following aspects with regards to the likely outcomes of the current welfare-to-work reform are looked at in this chapter:

- the contribution that moving the current target group successfully into employment would make to the overall employment target,
- future employment increases based on the steady-state assumption,
- the characteristics of lone parents in the target group,
- using Berthoud's concepts of multiple disadvantages the relative speed at which lone parents in this group are likely to move into employment will be estimated and
- lowering the age cut off point to three years or older.

Finally, a note on the data and terminology used in this chapter: As discussed in chapter three the data is the 2005 data from the Families and Children Study. The chapter focuses on a comparison between two groups of lone parents. The first are those lone parents who are targeted by the current welfare-to-work reform, i.e. those whose children are seven or older. This group will be referred to as **lone parents with older children**. The second group are lone parents whose youngest child is between three and six years old. This group will be referred to as **lone parents with younger children**. At times, lone parents whose youngest child is between nought and two years old will be included in the analysis and referred to as **lone parents with very young children**. I have also included lone parents whose youngest child is between 16 and 18 years old as they count as lone parents for the purposes of the employment rate even if they are not eligible for IS anymore.

## ***5.1 Effect of different activation scenarios on the employment target***

The current welfare-to-work reform, requiring lone parents on Income Support with older children to be available for work, is being introduced in stages (see chapter two). From November 2008 onwards, the age cut-off for the youngest child for Income Support eligibility has been lowered from 16 years to twelve years. It will be lowered further to ten years in October 2009 and seven years in October 2010, respectively. Therefore, the analysis of the current reform will focus on the eventual target group, i.e. lone parents whose youngest child is seven or older. However, where appropriate, the interim steps will also be examined. Unless otherwise stated the tables use 2005 FACS data.

Given that the selection criterion for the reform is the age of the youngest child, it seems sensible to compare the employment rates of lone parents by that criterion. Table 5.1 below shows that the employment rate increases with the age of the youngest child from 44 per cent for lone parents whose youngest child is under seven to 68 per cent for lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years and to 79 per cent for those whose youngest child is between 16 and 18 years and in full-time education (see also Gregg and Harkness 2003). In terms of the target group of the current welfare-to-work reform then, of lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years old, 68 per cent are in work (working at least one hour per week) while 27 per cent are on IS not working any hours. The current welfare-to-work reform aims to activate this particular group.

**Table 5.1: Employment rate by age of child of all lone parents in 2005**

Column %	Age of youngest child			
	0-6	7-15	16-18	All
<b>Work status</b>				
In Work	44	<b>68</b>	79	58
On IS	50	<b>27</b>	12	36
Other <sup>35</sup>	6	<b>5</b>	9	6
Total	100	<b>100</b>	100	100
Weighted base	759	<b>820</b>	141	1720

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents with dependent children, own analysis. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The higher employment rate of lone parents with older children to some extent supports the government's claim that this group of lone parents are 'able to work'. However, this does not necessarily apply to all lone parents in this group and it could be the case that the majority of lone parents with older children who want to work and are able to find a job already have done so (Gregg et al 2007). This would mean that it may be more difficult to move the remaining lone parents with older children into employment.

As mentioned above, arguably, one of the first questions when examining a policy option for reform is what it could achieve if it were to work perfectly. In other words, what would be the size of the effect if the reform were to be completely successful, i.e. what would be the impact on the overall employment rate of lone parents if all lone parents in the target group were to move into work. The size of this effect depends on the size of the target group relative to all lone parents. For example, if lone parents with older children on IS made up only five per cent of all lone parents, then even moving all of them into employment is unlikely to have a large effect on the employment rate of all lone parents. If, however, lone parents on IS with older

<sup>35</sup> As explained in the chapter on evidence-based-policy appraisals (chapter three) the 'other' group comprises lone parents who are neither working 16 hours per week nor receiving Income Support. They are treated as a separate group as are outside the activation mechanisms discussed in this chapter. In other words, as they do not receive Income Support, they cannot be transferred to Jobseeker's Allowance and therefore made to be available for work. The group has been included in table 5.2 for the sake of completeness but has been left out of most of the subsequent tables to improve their readability.

children constituted a quarter of all lone parents, the impact of a complete activation of this group is likely to be more substantial.

Lone parents in the target group of the current welfare-to-work reform, i.e. lone parents on IS with children aged between seven and 15, made up 13 per cent of all lone parents (table 5.2 below). The relatively high employment rate of lone parents with older children explains the difference in size between those in and out of work in terms of the overall proportion of lone parents (32 per cent and 13 per cent respectively – see table 5.2 below). The size of the target group for the current reform is relatively small consisting of 13 per cent of the lone parent population. In comparison, there are nearly twice as many lone parents with younger children on Income Support (see table 5.2 below).

**Table 5.2: Lone parents by work status and age of child in 2005**

Total %	Age of youngest child			
	0-6	7-15	16-18	All ages
<b>Work Status</b>				
In work	19	32	7	58
<b>On IS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>36</b>
Other	3	2	1	6
All	44	48	8	100
Unweighted base	759	820	141	1720

Source: FACS 2005, all lone parents with dependent children, own analysis. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The potential impact of targeting this group is examined using three hypothetical scenarios: First of all, what could be called the **best case scenario**, what would the effect be on the overall employment rate of lone parents if the activation was completely successful and 100 per cent of the target group moved into employment. Perhaps more realistically, the second hypothetical scenario is focusing on the employment target. In other words, what proportion of lone parents in the target group would need to move into employment for the overall employment target of 70 per cent to be met? This will be referred to as the **employment target scenario**. Finally, as discussed above, the employment target is seen as a policy lever to meet the child poverty target. Harker et al estimated that the overall employment rate of

lone parents would have to rise to 86 per cent in order for the child poverty target to be met all else being equal (2006; 13) <sup>36</sup>. Therefore, the **child poverty target scenario** will examine what proportion of the target group would need to move into employment for the overall employment rate to increase to 86 per cent.

Table 5.3 below shows the change in the employment rate of lone parents, if part or all of the lone parents in the target group were to be moved into employment. The employment rate of all lone parents in 2005 was 58 per cent (see table 5.1). The target group for the current reform is lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years. They constitute 13 per cent of all lone parents with dependent children (see table 5.2 above). In the best case scenario, i.e. if all of the lone parents in the target group were to move into employment, the overall employment rate would increase by those 13 per cent and be brought up to 71 per cent. Therefore, if all lone parents in the target group were to move into work, the overall employment rate would just exceed the employment target of 70 per cent. This means that it would be sufficient for 92 per cent of lone parents to move into employment for the exact employment rate of 70 per cent to be met (see table 5.3). However, even a complete activation of the target group would fall short of the required employment rate to meet the child poverty target (see table 5.3).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the employment rate in the Families and Children Study is two per cent higher than in the Labour Force Survey. If one assumes that the latter is likely to be more accurate given the much bigger sample size, it would mean that the employment target would just be missed if all lone parents in the target group were to move into work. Either way, in the best case scenario, the employment rate would either reach or come close to reaching the employment target.

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<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, if the employment target of 70 per cent was met for lone parents by 2010, then the proportion of dual earner couples would need to rise from 57 to 65 per cent and the proportion of unemployed couples fall from 5 to 4 per cent (Harker 2006; 13). The 86 per cent figure is used for illustration purposes as increasing the employment rate of lone parents is not the only policy lever the government can and is using to meet the child poverty target.

**Table 5.3: Comparison of different activation scenarios of lone parents with older children**

<b>Actual and potential employment rates</b>	<b>7-15 years</b>
Current employment rate of all lone parents with dependent children	58 %
Increase in overall employment rate in best case scenario	13 %
Maximum overall employment rate in best case scenario  (Maximum overall employment rate = current rate + increase in best case scenario)	71%
<b>Required employment rate to meet targets</b>	
Employment target (70% overall employment)	92 %
Child poverty target (86% overall employment)	>100 %

Source: FACS 2005, lone parents on IS with older children, own analysis. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

As mentioned above, the current welfare-to-work reform is being introduced in stages, successively lowering the age of the youngest child at which lone parents have to move across to Jobseeker's Allowance. Overall, the employment rate of lone parents would increase by 13 per cent to 71 per cent in the best case scenario if all lone parents in the target group, i.e. those on IS with children aged between seven and 15, were successfully activated. Table 5.4 shows a breakdown of those 13 per cent (in fact, 13.1 per cent), according to the different age groups proposed for the stepwise introduction of the reform. Moving all lone parents whose youngest child is between 12 and 15 years old into employment would increase the overall employment rate by 5.5 per cent. This compares to an increase of 2.9 per cent in the employment rate, if all of those lone parents whose youngest child is between ten and eleven years old were to move into employment. If all of the lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and nine years old were to move into employment, the overall employment rate would increase by 4.7 per cent. The differences between

the age groups are due to the overall size of these groups. Decimal points have been reported in this instance because of the relative closeness of the figures.

**Table 5.4: Reform potential by age of youngest child within target group of current reform (lone parents with older children)**

Interim target groups	Increase in employment rate in best case scenario
7-9	+5.5
10-11	+2.9
12-15	+4.7
7-15	=13.1

Source: FACS 2005, lone parents on IS with older children, own analysis. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

To summarise, lone parents in the target group, i.e. lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years, make up 13 per cent of all lone parents. The employment target of 70 per cent for all lone parents would be achieved if all lone parents in that target group were to move into employment. The current overall employment rate of 58 per cent would only rise to 71 per cent if those 13 per cent being targeted would all move into employment. Therefore, it would be sufficient if 92 per cent of lone parents would move into employment to reach the exact figure of 70 per cent. However, this means that meeting the child poverty target through activation alone is not feasible.

While it would therefore be as such feasible to meet the employment target through focusing on lone parents on IS with older children, it would require an almost complete activation of this group. The following sections will examine the likelihood of such a scenario by looking at their past trends in their employment rate as well as the composition of this group. The next section starts by examining steady-state employment rates of the target group over the past few years as an indication of their future employment rates.

## ***5.2 The steady-state employment rate as an indicator for future development of the employment rate***

One way of estimating employment rates for coming years is to base assumptions on trends from previous years (see e.g. Berthoud 2003a and Gregg et al 2006). In other words, the estimate of an employment rate at some point in the future is a projection of past employment patterns. In table 5.5 the employment rates of lone parents are broken down by age of the youngest child and shown from 2002 to 2005. The overall employment rate (bottom line of table 5.5) has increased by four per cent from 53 per cent in 2002 to 58 per cent in 2005. The increase has been similar across all groups irrespective of the age of the youngest child. For example, the employment rate of lone parents with older children has increased from 63 per cent in 2002 to 68 per cent in 2005 (table 5.5 – highlighted row). The increase in the employment rate of lone parents whose youngest child is under seven years old was smaller from 40 per cent to 44 per cent between 2002 and 2005 while that of lone parents whose youngest child is between 16 and 18 and still in full-time education rose from 74 per cent in 2002 to 79 per cent in 2005 (all in table 5.5).

The main increase in terms of the employment rate across all age groups seems to have taken place between 2004 and 2005, e.g. for those with older children, the employment rate increased from 62 per cent to 68 per cent when it had been relatively stable over the previous two years (table 5.5). In order to establish whether the increase is a consistent trend or a one-off jump, data from 2006 and 2007 would be required. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the FACS data for 2006 and 2007 has not been released yet. However, the official reports have been published already showing the more recent development of the employment rate of lone parents. This suggests that the overall employment rate has remained stable at 58 per cent for those two years (Conolly and Kerr 2008, p. 100, table 5.1 and Philo et al 2009, p. 103, table 5.1). The breakdown by age of child given in both reports is not overly useful in this context as it uses different age divisions to this analysis and include mothers in couples in the overall figure and is therefore susceptible to changes in the composition of both groups of families. For this reason, figures from this report have not been included in the analysis.



**Table 5.5: Employment rates from 2002 to 2005 of all lone parents by age of child**

	Year			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Age of child</b>				
0-6	40	39	41	44
<b>7-15</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>68</b>
16-18	74	75	74	79
All	53	52	53	58
Weighted base	1824	1803	1725	1720

Source: 2002-2005 FACS data: own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children, weighted using cross-sectional weights for the respective waves (Dgrossw Egrossw, Fgrossw and Ggrossw), own analysis. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

A similar jump in the employment rate of lone parents can be detected when using LFS data (see Freud 2007) though it has been more pronounced in FACS than in LFS data. However, the reasons for the difference between the two datasets is not clear (Lilly 2009) and not explored in the official FACS report using 2005 data (Lyon et al 2007).

Taking all this into account, a better reflection of the employment trend over the past four years would be to take an average across the four years rather than project the accelerated increase of the 2004 to 2005 time period forward. Therefore, if the rate of increase continued at the same pace, the employment rate of all lone parents would grow by about six per cent to 64 per cent in 2010 and would reach 70 per cent by 2015. This estimate is similar to those by Berthoud (2003b) and Gregg et al (2007), both using LFS data.

Breaking down the target group by the activation intervals, however, shows that within the selected group, the employment rate of those whose youngest child is between 10 and 11 years old had the highest increase of the three sub-groups from 58 per cent in 2002 to 71 per cent in 2005 (table 5.6). The employment rate of lone parents whose youngest child is between 12 and 15 also increased, 66 per cent in 2002 to 71 in 2005. In contrast, the employment rate of lone parents whose child is between seven and nine years old has actually fallen from 63 per cent in 2002 to 61

per cent in 2005. Therefore, the increase in the employment rate of all lone parents with older children between 2002 and 2005 has mainly been driven by the increased employment entry of lone parents whose youngest child is between ten and eleven years old and to a lesser extend by those whose youngest child is between 12 and 15 years old (all in table 5.6).

**Table 5.6: Employment rates from 2002 to 2005 of lone parents within target group of current reform (lone parents with older children)**

	Year			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Age of child</b>				
12-15	66	64	66	71
10-11	58	58	63	71
7-9	63	60	59	61
7-15	63	62	62	68
Weighted base	839	864	751	820

Source: 2002-2005 FACS data: own analysis: all lone parents with older children, weighted using cross-sectional weights for the respective waves (Dgrossw Egrossw, Fgrossw and Ggrossw), own analysis. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Steady-state based estimates are based on a set of assumptions, mainly that there are no substantial changes in the macroeconomic climate, in the composition of lone parents and in policies affecting this group. The first one clearly does not hold any longer and further policy changes in addition to the current welfare-to work reform are also planned. These points will be discussed further in chapter eight.

The following section will instead examine the composition of the target group in more detail. The comparison of employment rates within the target group of lone parents with older children raises questions about the underlying causes of these trends, whether age of child cut-off points are meaningful and if so, what drives them. This question will be examined in the following section by looking more closely at the characteristics associated with non-employment of lone parents according to the age of their youngest child.

### **5.3 The characteristics of lone parents with older children who are not in work**

Targeting lone parents for work activation on the basis of the age of their youngest child does not take into account other circumstances of the lone parent family and the lone parent in particular. Yet, as discussed in chapter three there seems to be agreement that there are distinct differences in terms of the characteristics between lone parents in and out of work suggesting that they also play a role in determining the 'ability to work' of lone parents.

The following characteristics have been linked to non-employment :

- Having a child under five,
- Having three or more children,
- Being single rather than divorced or separated,
- Having a health problem,
- Not having any qualifications,
- Not having any recent work experience,
- Not receiving maintenance,
- Living in social housing and
- Not looking to move into work.

(see research review in chapter three)

Again, as discussed in chapter three, the term 'characteristics' encompasses a range of different factors and only some of them are amenable to direct policy intervention, namely the lack of qualifications and potentially, social housing. Other characteristics such as health problems and motivation are more difficult to tackle. The purpose of the analysis is to explore whether lone parents with older children not in work differ in terms of the above characteristics from those in work. If these characteristics are an indication for the 'ability to work', it could be argued that those differences should be less pronounced between lone parents in the target group and those with older children already in work if lone parents in the target group are indeed able to move into work.

However, some of the characteristics named only pertain to those out of work, namely work anticipation and labour market and IS receipt history. Therefore, this section on characteristics has been divided into two parts. The first part focuses on characteristics that apply to both lone parents in and out of work. Here the characteristics such as marital status, tenure and qualifications will be compared for

lone parents in and out of work. Given the context, the analysis focuses on lone parents whose youngest child is between seven years and 15 years old.

The characteristics are presented in a summarised fashion for three reasons: firstly in order to bring out the actual characteristics linked to non-employment, secondly, to avoid having to present large amounts of tables and finally, as these groupings are used for the concept of multiple disadvantages in section 5.4. For example, the tables show only what proportion of lone parents have three or more children and those who have fewer children rather than a more complete breakdown of the number of children.

Table 5.7 then compares **lone parents with older children in and out of work** by characteristics linked to non-employment. Some clear differences emerge from this comparison. For example, lone parents on IS are twice as likely than their counterparts in work to have three or more children (16 per cent compared to eight per cent – see table 5.7) and also more likely to be single rather than formerly married than their counterparts in work (45 per cent compared to 30 per cent - table 5.7). However, when looking at the other characteristics, the differences increase further: lone parents on IS with older children are more than three times as likely than those in work with older children for either themselves or at least one of their children to have a work-limiting impairment, three times as likely not to have any qualifications (35 per cent compared to eleven per cent), and three times as likely to be social tenants (73 per cent compared to 28 per cent – all in table 5.7). Finally, the difference is even more pronounced when it comes to maintenance receipt with 41 per cent of lone parents with older children in work receiving some maintenance compared to only eight per cent of lone parents on IS with older children (table 5.7). In other words, lone parents with older children who are on Income Support are more likely to have the characteristics associated with not being in work than those in work and the differences are statistically significant (see table 5.7).

**Table 5.7: Comparison of characteristics of lone parents with older children by their work status**

Column %	Working	On IS	All
<b>Number of dep. children</b>			
3+	8	16	11
1 or 2	92	84	90
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single (incl. former cohabitees)	30	45	34
Other (separated, divorced or widowed)	70	55	66
<b>Health</b>			
Impairment	13	43	22
No impairment	87	57	78
<b>Any qualifications</b>			
No	11	35	18
Yes	89	65	83
<b>Tenure</b>			
Social tenant	28	73	40
Other (mortgage, private tenant or other)	73	27	60
<b>Receives maintenance</b>			
No	59	92	68
Yes	41	8	32
Weighted base	556	225	820

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with older children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. All crosstabulations are statistically significant (chi square,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Moving on then to look at lone parents with older children on Income Support more closely, table 5.8 shows more of the characteristics linked with non-employment mentioned in the literature such as recent work experience, particularly in the low skill sector. Over half of lone parents with older children in this group have either been receiving Income Support for six years or more or have never worked (table 5.8). In other words, the majority does not have any recent work experience. Also discussed in the employability literature is the effect of local employment rates<sup>37</sup>, which will be incorporated in the summation of disadvantages in the following section. Therefore, table 5.8 also shows the three government office regions with the highest and the lowest general employment rate, the latter being London, Wales and the North East. The difference between the region with the highest (South East) and the lowest (London) employment rate at ten per cent is substantial and likely to affect the employment chances of lone parents. Finally, as discussed in chapter three, it has been argued that the majority of lone parents on IS have a form of timetable in their minds for moving into work. This timetable is determined by a range of factors linked to movements into work which are more difficult to measure in surveys such as confidence and idea of how to combine parenthood and working as well as qualifications and work history. Therefore, I have included the work anticipation of lone parents, i.e. whether they are planning to look and are expecting to be in work within the next two years. According to this 43 per cent are anticipating moving into work within the next two years, while 16 per cent are not planning to look for work. The remaining 41 per cent have given either incomplete or conflicting answers.

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<sup>37</sup> Employment rates rather than unemployment rates have been chosen deliberately given that it reflects the level of economic inactivity across regions. This is appropriate in the context of lone parents and employment as the majority of lone parents not in work tends to classify itself as looking after their child/ren, i.e. economically inactive, rather than as looking for work and therefore unemployed.

**Table 5.8: Employability factors for lone parents with older children on IS**

Column %	On IS
<b>Time away from the labour market</b>	
Never worked or in IS for six or more years <sup>38</sup>	59
Other	41
<b>Employment rate by government office region</b>	
London	69
North East	71
Wales	71
South West	78
Eastern	78
South East	79
<b>Work anticipation</b>	
Looking and expecting to work in 2 years	43
Not looking nor expecting to move into work	16
Other	41
Weighted base	225

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with older children on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Comparing the characteristics of lone parents with older children between those in work and those on Income Support shows two clear patterns. In particular, lone parents on Income Support are much more likely to:

- Have no qualifications,
- Live in social housing,
- Not receive child support payments,
- Have a disability or health impairment and/ or have a child with a disability or impairment.

<sup>38</sup> This measure is capturing all lone parents who have never worked or have been on IS for six or more years. However, it does not capture individuals who may not have been working for the past six or more years but had been in a relationship at the time. For further analysis using an alternative variable, please refer to the forthcoming journal articles.

The link between the above variables and whether a lone parent is in work or on Income Support is statistically significant<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, while two fifths of lone parents in this group are planning to be in work in two years time, nearly three fifths have either been on IS for six or more years or have never worked. This means that a large section of the target group does not have any recent labour market experience. In summary then, a comparison of the characteristics between lone parents with older children in and out of work seems to support the argument by Gregg et al 2007 that the majority of lone parents that are able to work already do at this stage. However, while this section has shown up clear differences between the two groups, it has not taken into account the distribution of those characteristics. This will be the focus of the following section.

#### ***5.4 Multiple barriers and the likely rate of employment entry***

The previous section compared lone parents with older children in and out of work according to individual characteristics. However, as discussed in chapter two, the emphasis has recently shifted towards individuals with multiple disadvantages to employment. The underlying argument is that having only one disadvantage such as being a lone parent is not sufficient justification for being out of the labour market any longer. As discussed in chapter four, the concept of multiple disadvantages is operationalised as an adaptation of the work by Berthoud (2003a) on multiple disadvantages. Berthoud (2003a) analysed the effects of combining multiple disadvantages such as ethnicity, skills, health, age, family structure and labour demand on the likelihood of labour market entry. His analysis suggests that a cumulative model is as good a predictor for unemployment risk as models taking into account particular combinations of disadvantages. As explained in the chapter on evidence-based-policy appraisals, the disadvantages used by Berthoud (2003a) have been adapted for this analysis. They are:

- Having three or more children,
- Not having any qualifications,
- Having been on Income Support for six or more years or never having worked,
- Either the lone parent or at least one child to have an impairment that is expected to last for a year and limits either the amount or kind of work the parent can engage in and
- Living in the government region with the lowest employment rate.

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<sup>39</sup> At the 0.01 level using the x square test.



All of these characteristics have been included in tables 5.7 and 5.8. Table 5.9 shows the distribution of lone parents with older children according to the number of disadvantages by work status. There seem to be clear differences between lone parents with older children on IS and those in work. Simply adding these five disadvantages together shows that only 15 per cent of lone parents on IS in the target group had none of the above disadvantages (see table 5.9), whereas this was the case for 64 per cent of those in work, four times as many. Moreover, only six per cent of lone parents in work had two or more disadvantages, compared to 54 per cent of lone parents on IS (adding those with two and three or more disadvantages together).

**Table 5.9: Number of disadvantages of lone parents with older children by work status**

Column %	Work status		
	In work	On IS	All
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>			
None	64	15	49
One	29	32	30
Two	6	28	12
Three or more	*	26	8
All	100	100	100
Weighted Base	555	224	818

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with older children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. The correlation is statistically significant (chi square,  $p < 0.05$ ).

In other words, just over half of lone parents in the target group on IS had two or more disadvantages, just over a quarter had three or more. This compares to over two thirds of lone parents with older children in work who did not have any disadvantages. This analysis suggests that there is a substantial group of lone parents on IS with older children who are going to find it difficult to move into the labour market as they are likely to have a combination of disadvantages such as having three or more children, ill health and no qualifications.

The welfare-to-work reform focuses on lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years. The stated aim of the reform is to increase the overall employment rate of lone parents and by so doing reduce child poverty levels. The employment rate for this group is already relatively high, compared to lone parents with younger children at 68 per cent. Moreover, the target group, i.e. lone parents on Income Support with older children, is relatively small comprising only 13 per cent of all lone parents. However, if all lone parents with older children were to move into employment, the employment target of 70 per cent of all lone parents in employment would be reached.

The analysis of the FACS data presented above has shown that a large proportion of the target group faces some disadvantages when approaching the labour market, such as ill-health, lack of qualifications and time spent outside the labour market. Around half of all lone parents in this group have at least two of these disadvantages and a quarter have three or more disadvantages. This suggests that the target group may not be ideally chosen if the aim of the reform is to make substantive progress towards the employment target as this group may find it difficult to move into the labour market. Instead, this reform is likely to create a new group of long-term unemployed, which will face the increased activity requirements introduced as part of the Flexible New Deal. This will be discussed further in chapter eight. One alternative is to also activate lone parents with younger children, e.g. when the youngest child reaches the age of three, as is the case in a number of other countries. This possibility will be explored in the following section.

### ***5.5 Activating lone parents with younger children***

A number of countries have been focussing on lone parents being available for work when their youngest child reaches the age of three, rather than the age of seven, as is the case in Britain (OECD 2007). The Welfare Reform Bill (DWP 2009) currently going through parliament suggests lowering the age cut off for work activation to three years though lone parents would be required to carry out work-related activities rather than be available for work until their youngest child reaches the age of seven. One of the main arguments for the lower age cut off in most other countries is the link to parental leave regulations which means that parents are expected to work thereafter, e.g. in the Scandinavian countries. This is not the case in Britain, where parental leave regulations do not cover such a long period. Rather the argument for

the earlier cut off point seemed to be based on research around the link between maternal employment and child development which suggest that maternal employment when the child is over three is no longer harmful to the cognitive and behavioural development of the child (Gregg et al 2005). As discussed in chapter two this is in line with the focus of the respective New Labour governments of children as becomings rather than beings (Lister 2006).

In order to establish whether this would be a viable alternative to the current reform, lone parents with younger children on Income Support are compared with those with the same status who are in work. This analysis follows the same pattern as in the previous chapter and examines:

- the potential impact on the overall employment rate,
- the characteristics and
- calculation of the multiple disadvantages for this group.

The aim is to examine whether there are differences, in terms of characteristics linked between those in and out of employment in the various target groups. Where appropriate I have included comparison with the target group of the current welfare-to-work reform in Britain.

The employment rate of lone parents with older children (seven to 15) is 68 per cent, as compared with the 53 per cent for lone parents with younger children (three to six) (see table 5.10).

**Table 5.10: Employment rates of lone parents by age of youngest child**

Column %	Age of youngest child			
	0-2	3-6	7-15	All
<b>Work status</b>				
In Work	34	<b>53</b>	68	58
On IS	58	<b>43</b>	27	36
Other	9	<b>4</b>	5	6
All	100	<b>100</b>	100	100
Weighted base	365	<b>394</b>	820	1720

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The overall size of the group of lone parents whose youngest child is between three and six years old is much smaller than that of those whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years old (23 per cent compared to 48 per cent of all lone parents – see table 5.11). However, given the lower employment rate of lone parents with younger children, the size of the group of lone parents on IS with younger children is actually not that different from that of lone parents on IS with older children (ten and 13 per cent respectively – see table 5.11).

**Table 5.11: Work status of all lone parents by age of youngest child**

Total %	Age of youngest child				
	0-2	3-6	7-15	16-18	All ages
<b>Work Status</b>					
In Work	7	12	32	6	58
<b>On IS</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>36</b>
Other	2	1	2	1	6
All	21	23	48	8	100
Weighted base	365	394	820	141	1720

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. All crosstabulations are statistically significant (chi square,  $p < 0.05$ ).

As before, the potential impact a successful activation of the respective target group on the employment target is examined. The column of lone parents with older children has been taken from table 5.4 above and is included here, by way of comparison. If all lone parents with younger children were to move into employment, the overall employment rate would increase by 10 per cent to 68 per cent (see table 5.12). That is, this increase by itself would just fall short of the employment target of 70 per cent.

However, if both groups of lone parents with older and younger children were to be targeted, i.e. if all lone parents whose youngest child was aged three or over were to be targeted, the overall employment rate would increase by 23 per cent to 81 per cent<sup>40</sup> (see table 5.12). In other words, if all lone parents whose children were three years or older were to move into employment, the employment target would be met easily. In fact, it would only require the successful activation of just over half of all lone parents with older and younger children to move into work for the employment target to be met. However, meeting the child poverty target solely by increasing the employment rate of lone parents with older and younger child is still not feasible (table 5.12).

This would be feasible only if all lone parents on IS, irrespective of age of their youngest child were to be activated. Then it would suffice if 77 per cent of this group moved into employment to meet the child poverty target and 66 per cent to meet the employment target (table 5.12). However, as discussed in Thurley et al (2003) the cost of activating all lone parents would be prohibitive.

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<sup>40</sup> The 23 per cent employment increase is made up of the 10 per cent increase if all lone parents with younger children were to move into employment, added to the 13 per cent if all lone parents with older children were to move into employment (see table 5.3).

**Table 5.12: Comparison of policy potential by age of child**

Potential employment scenarios	3-6	7-15		3-15	All on IS
Current employment rate	58	58		58	58
Best case scenario	+10%	+13 %		+23%	35%
Maximum employment rate	68%	71%		81%	93%
<b>To meet targets</b>					
Employment target	>100%	>92 %		+91%	66%
Child poverty target	>100%	>100 %		>100%	77%

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is below 16 years old. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Looking at the steady-state calculation for this age group as a way of estimating the likely trend in the employment rate (see table 5.13) suggests that the overall employment rate of lone parents would not change much if lone parents with younger children were to be activated as the employment rate of lone parents with younger children has remained relatively stable over the period from 2002 to 2005. It stood at 52 per cent in 2002 after dipping in 2003 and 2004 and it increased to 53 per cent in 2005 (see table 5.13). In fact, it seems that the biggest growth in employment has taken place among the group of lone parents with very young children where the employment rate has increased from 25 per cent in 2002 to 34 per cent in 2005 (table 5.13). In other words, the growth in employment rates for lone parents whose children were younger than seven years observed in table 5.5 seems to be driven by the group with very young children. Thus, looking at the trend of the combined employment rate of lone parents with older and younger children from 2002 to 2005 when it increased from 60 per cent in 2002 to 62 per cent in 2005 (table 5.13) suggests that in the absence of other changes any increases in the employment rate are unlikely to be driven by this combined group.

**Table 5.13: Employment rates by age of child from 2002 to 2005**

	Year			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Age of child</b>				
0-2	25	29	35	34
<b>3-6</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>53</b>
7-15	63	62	62	68
16-18	74	75	74	79
3-15	60	58	58	62
All	52	52	53	58
Total	1824	1803	1725	1720

Source: 2002-2005 FACS data: own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children, weighted using cross-sectional weights for the respective waves (Dgrossw Egrossw, Fgrossw and Ggrossw), own analysis. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

However, having a child under five is cited in the literature as one of the main characteristics linked to non-employment. As before, the extension of the target group will be compared against their counterparts in work according to the main characteristics linked to non-employment. Arguably, the two groups could be expected to be more similar than those with older children as some of the characteristics are age dependent such as health and qualifications.

Table 5.14 lone parents on IS with younger children are compared with those in work and it suggests that the differences are almost as stark as they were for lone parents with older children. There were some clear differences between the two groups with those on IS being around twice as likely to have three or more children (27 per cent compared to 12 per cent), to be a social tenant (70 per cent compared to 33 per cent) and not to receive maintenance (47 per cent compared to 86 per cent – all in table 5.14) than those in work. The difference between lone parents with younger children on IS and those in work is even more pronounced when looking at ill-health (25 per cent of those on IS either have a work-limiting impairment themselves or

have at least one child with such an impairment compared to nine per cent of those in work – table 5.14) and not having any qualifications (30 per cent compared to 10 per cent –table 5.14). The differences in terms of former marital status and impairment are less pronounced between the two groups (see table 5.14). However, comparing lone parents on Income Support with younger children to those with older children highlights a number of key differences (see tables 5.7 and 5.13 in this chapter). The differences are largely due to the link between the age of the youngest child and the age of the lone parents, i.e. lone parents with older children tend to be older themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that lone parents on IS with older children are less likely to have three or more dependent children, or to have been single or cohabiting and more likely to have an impairment.



**Table 5.14 Characteristics of lone parents with younger children by work status**

Column %	Work status		
	Working	On IS	All
<b>Number of dep. children</b>			
3+	12	27	19
1 or 2	88	73	81
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single (incl. former cohabiters)	57	71	38
Other (separated/divorced/widowed)	43	29	62
<b>Health</b>			
Impairment	9	25	17
No impairment	92	75	83
<b>Any qualifications</b>			
No	10	30	17
Yes	90	70	83
<b>Tenure</b>			
Social tenant	33	70	51
Other (mortgage, private tenant)	67	30	50
<b>Receives maintenance</b>			
No	47	86	65
Yes	53	14	36
Weighted base	210	169	394

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with younger children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. All crosstabulations are statistically significant (chi square,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Moving on to looking at the group on IS in more detail, again lone parents with younger children in this group do not tend to be closer to the labour market in terms of recent experience than those with older children. Just over a third have been on IS for six or more years or have never worked compared to two fifths of those with older children. (see tables 5.15 and 5.8). The main difference seems to be the orientation towards the labour market with only seven per cent of lone parents on IS with younger children stating that they are not planning to move into work compared to 16 per cent of those with older children (see tables 5.15 and 5.8) though a similar proportion is expecting to be looking and working in the next two years (47 per cent compared to 41 per cent - tables 5.15. and 5.8).

**Table 5.15: Employability factors for lone parents with younger children on IS**

Column %	On IS
<b>Time away from the labour market</b>	
Never worked or in IS for six or more years	36
Other	64
<b>Looking for and expecting to work within 2 years</b>	
Yes	47
Not wanting to work	7
Other	46
Weighted base	169

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with younger children on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

To summarise then, comparing the characteristics between lone parents with younger children on IS and those in work highlights the differences between the two groups in terms of their characteristics: Lone parents with younger children on IS are much more likely to have characteristics that are associated with non-employment, such as: no qualifications, living in social housing, having three or more children and are more likely to be younger than their counterparts in work. Yet, when comparing

the distribution of the characteristics associated with non-employment between lone parents on IS with younger and with older children, it seems that those with younger children are closer to work.

Finally, when examining the joint occurrence of disadvantages, a similar picture emerges with lone parents on IS with younger children still being substantially more likely to have multiple disadvantages compared to their counterparts in work (see table 5.16). While just over two thirds of lone parents with younger children in work do not have any disadvantages, this applies to only a quarter of lone parents on IS (table 5.16.). Similarly, while only eight per cent of lone parents with younger children in work have two or more disadvantages, of those on Income Support, 42 per cent have two or more disadvantages (table 5.16).

**Table 5.16: Number of disadvantages by work status for lone parents with younger children**

Column %	Work Status		
	In work	On IS	All
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>			
None	68	24	48
One	24	34	29
Two	8	25	16
Three or more	*	17	8
All	100	100	100
Weighted Base	209	169	393

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with younger children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. All crosstabulations are statistically significant (chi square,  $p < 0.05$ ).

However, when comparing the number of disadvantages between the two groups of lone parents on IS, i.e. those with younger and with older children, a different pattern emerges (table 5.17). Only 17 per cent of lone parents on IS with younger children have three or more disadvantages while the same applies to 26 per cent of lone parents on IS with older children (table 5.17). In other words, lone parents with older

children are more likely to have numerous disadvantages than those with younger children. However, the difference is not very large.

**Table 5.17: Comparison of number of disadvantages between lone parents on Income Support with older and younger children**

Column %	Age of child	
	3-6	7-15
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>		
None	24	15
One	34	32
Two	25	28
Three or more	17	26
All	100	100
Weighted Base	169	225

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents on IS with younger and older children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

A number of countries target lone parents for employment once their youngest child is three years old. Therefore, this policy has been applied to the British case. If lone parents in both groups, i.e. with younger and with older children were to be successfully activated, the employment target would be met. When comparing lone parents with younger children in work with those on IS, in terms of their characteristics, clear differences emerge and a higher proportion of lone parents on IS had the characteristics associated with non-employment such as: having three or more children, not having any qualifications, living in social accommodation and not receiving child support. This is confirmed when applying the concept of multiple disadvantages (Berthoud 2003a), in that lone parents with younger children on IS are almost twice as likely to have at least one disadvantage compared to their counterparts in work. However, the incidence and number of disadvantages increases with the age of child.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has focused on the age of child as the criterion to select lone parents for work activation. The first part focused on lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years old as this is the target group for activation within the current welfare-to-work reform. The second part examined the option of lowering the age of child to three years for the purposes of activating lone parents as this is used as the cut-off point in a range of other countries. In order to meet the stated objective of the reform, namely to hit the employment target, it would be sufficient if all lone parents with older children were successfully activated though it would not be feasible to meet the child poverty target through activating this group alone. When adding those lone parents with younger children, it would suffice if two thirds moved into employment, which would be more realistic.

However, when comparing the employment rates of lone parents with older children and those with younger children over time, it seems while that of the former has grown by five per cent in the four years in question, that of the latter group has only increased by one per cent. In the absence of other changes, it could be assumed that the employment rate of lone parents would continue to grow from an already high starting point though it would need to accelerate to have a substantial impact on the overall employment rate. By contrast the employment rate of parents with younger children has increased only slightly and it could therefore be argued that this group would benefit more from policy attention than lone parents with older children. As mentioned in chapter two, this is encompassed in the Welfare Reform Bill currently going through parliament and will be discussed further in chapter eight.

As discussed in chapter two, the age of child criterion does not take other circumstances of the lone parent family such as the qualifications and work history of the lone parent or problems of ill health into account. However, much of the research literature discussed in chapter three suggests that particular characteristics are linked to non-employment and a comparison between those characteristics of the lone parents with older children in and out of work, suggests that those out of work are quite a different group. This is confirmed when adding labour market disadvantages together. The difference within lone parents with younger children between those in work and those on IS are less pronounced but still evident.

Altogether therefore, selecting lone parents for work activation does not necessarily take into account the wider circumstances of lone parent families and therefore, their

chances and ability to move into the labour market. The following chapter will explore alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation by the age of child.

## CHAPTER 6: Alternative ways of selecting lone parents for work activation

As suggested in the Green Book, the development of policy alternatives should be based on: an analysis of the available evidence, consultation with stakeholders, possible policy instruments and the identification of examples of best practice, including an international review of policies (HM Treasury 2003). This chapter is concentrating on the latter and discusses four alternative approaches to the age of the youngest child approach discussed in the previous chapter to selecting lone parents for activation.

As has been discussed in chapter two, the majority of countries have activation policies regarding lone parents (Carcillo and Grubb 2006) and a number of them have introduced work requirements or increased their stringency in the past 15 years (Millar 2005). This applies in particular those which are traditionally cited for policy learning in Britain, such as the other English speaking countries and Scandinavia. The current welfare reform in Great Britain has followed a similar pattern and it would appear that the direction of movement in this country is to be further activation (Gregg 2008 and White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* Cm7506 2008). However, focusing on the age of child alone means that the individual circumstances of the lone parents are not taken into account. Furthermore, 'ability to work' is defined by the needs of the child rather than the labour market prospects of the lone parent. While the age of child approach has been implemented in many countries, a number of countries have taken a different view.

The first step therefore is to identify the different approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation in different countries. As mentioned above, a number of studies have tried to identify whether lone parents are treated as mothers or workers in different welfare regimes (Kilkey 2000, Lewis 1997 and Duncan and Edwards 1997) based on the mother/worker dichotomy developed initially by Lewis and Ostner (1994). Yet, following the argument made by Lewis (2006) that the more appropriate question now is not whether lone parents are treated as workers but **when** they are treated as workers (emphasis added by the author), the focus of the international comparison in this thesis is therefore on the criteria for selecting lone parents into

activation rather than activation programmes, their different stages and administration more generally.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, policy to increase the level of activation of lone parents have been introduced in many countries and the focus of much of the comparative literature has mirrored this shift (Millar and Evans 2003 and Knijn et al 2007, see also OECD Babies and Bosses series 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006). The literature on the activation of lone parents in different countries tends to describe the activation policies as a whole, i.e. moving into work and making work pay, their history, implementation and early effects rather than examine the selection of lone parents in detail (Millar and Evans 2003, Knijn et al 2007, Carcillo and Grubb 2006). Frequently, the aim is to see 'what works' in terms of the activation of lone parents in terms of all the aspects mentioned above with the aim of facilitating policy learning (see Millar and Evans 2003 and Carcillo and Grubb 2006).

Millar (2001) and Carcillo and Grubb (2006) focus more on the type of activity requirements and its administration and have included selection criteria in their discussion. Both argue that most countries select lone parents into work based on the age of the youngest child (Carcillo and Grubb 2006 and Millar 2001). Millar (2001) demonstrates the link between age of child and increasing work requirements in a range of countries. However, it appears that age of the child is often only one of several criteria and that the underlying rationale is not solely focused on concerns around child development and physical care needs. I would therefore extend the point made by Lewis (2006) that 'when' lone parents are being activated as the current key question to 'who' is being activated as it may not be solely on the basis of a particular timeline as the use of 'when' suggests but some other conceptual approach. This suggests another extension, namely 'how'. In other words, how is the decision arrived at, i.e. is it based on a fixed criterion such as the age of the youngest child or a composite of characteristics that are assessed by a caseworker, perhaps using a profiling tool, or is the decision to look for work left to lone parents themselves.

Instead, when taking into account differences in underlying approaches and the administration of the selection criteria, I would argue that six different types of activation approaches with regards to selecting lone parents into employment can be identified. These are laid out in table 6.1 below. In the first approach, all lone parents have to be available for work, i.e. general activation is taking place. In the second



approach, activation is based on the age of the youngest child only. In other words, the selection criterion is based on a calendar event and therefore relatively straightforward to administer. I have called the third approach 'transition' as the aim of the benefit is to support lone parents in the transition towards being the main breadwinner. Eligibility for the income replacement benefit is determined in part by the age of the youngest child and in part by the relationship status based on self-reporting. The fourth approach has been called 'employability'. Lone parents are profiled according to their ability to compete in the labour market in this approach often using standardised profiling tools in combination with a caseworker assessment. The fifth approach also relies most heavily on the judgement of the caseworker. In this approach the caseworker is able to make more independent assessments rather than this judgement being either based on or supplementing a relatively rigorous assessment checklist as in the employability approach. Finally, the sixth approach is called 'voluntary' because in these countries lone parents are treated as (usually poor) mothers while they have dependent children, which means that they do not have to look for work and that therefore participation in active labour market programmes tends to be voluntary.

This policy appraisal has been set up as a broad exploration of the alternative approaches to the selection criteria for work activation. Therefore, all the different approaches have been taken forward into the analysis, except for the caseworker approach. Given the adopted methodology of identifying the respective target groups in the British case using secondary analysis, it was not possible to replicate caseworker decisions. I have also taken out the 'general activation' approach from the analysis as the aim of the thesis is to compare different selection criteria whereas the general activation approach would mean looking at all lone parents out of work.

For each of the other approaches I have selected a country case study in order to illustrate the policy approach, its implementation and how well it is working as far as possible. The case studies have been selected on the basis of three main criteria:

1. Those who performed best against the stated objectives of the current welfare-to-work reform, namely of improving the employment rate and reducing poverty levels. However, it is acknowledged both the employment rate and the poverty level are likely to be driven by a whole range of other factors.
2. Countries who have recently introduced activation policies in order to illustrate the perception of the 'policy problem' and

3. The availability of literature and particularly, evaluation studies in English in order to provide some assessment of the success of the activation approaches discussed.

These criteria form the basis of the case study selection that is discussed in more detail for each of the approaches in chapter six. In addition to the alternative approaches, I have included a variation of the age of child approach in the analysis in chapter five. This is because the age cut-off point for the age of child is still relatively high in Britain even after the current welfare-to-work reform (see Carciallo and Grubb 2006) and, as already suggested in the Gregg report (Gregg 2008), lowering the age cut off further, e.g. to the age of three would seem an 'obvious' direction to take.

Arguably, the pre-dominance of the age of child approach (Carcillo and Grubb 2006) throws into question the usefulness of looking at alternative approaches. However, the guidance on policy appraisals recommends to take a broad and 'radical' approach (HMTreasury 2003) which is why the alternative approaches have been included in this analysis.

Table 6.1: Six approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation

Name	General activation	Age of child	Transition	Employability	Caseworker	Voluntary
Approach	No protected periods.	The 'ability to work' is linked to the age of the youngest child. In a number of countries the age limit is linked to other benefits, e.g. it follows parental leave entitlements and the regulation is not targeted at lone parents as such. In other countries, the social assistance eligibility applies only to lone parents.	Assumption that lone parents would benefit from a period of transition from becoming a lone parent to becoming the main breadwinner. Often social assistance entitlement until the youngest child is three and then for one year if a separation occurs before the youngest child reaches the age of seven.	In this approach ability to work is conceptualised as ability to obtain a job in the labour market and therefore combines the age of the youngest child with characteristics of the lone parent. For example, employment history, qualifications, health, work orientation and age of child.	This approach combines the motivation and choice of lone parents with the professional assessment of the caseworker.	Assumption that majority of lone parents would like to work and should be given the choice over the timing of labour market (re-) entry. Enabling policies such as the New Deal for Lone Parents but no compulsion.
Countries	Portugal Spain Japan	UK (12/10/7) Finland (3) Sweden (1.5) Canada (0.5 to 6) Austria (3) Switzerland (3) Australia (5) Netherlands (5) Germany (3) Denmark (1)	Norway France	US	New Zealand	Ireland UK prior to introduction of WFIs

Sources: Carcillo and Grubb (2006), OECD (2005), OECD (2004), OECD (2003), OECD (2002)

In this chapter four of the six alternative approaches will be examined each time illustrated by a country case study<sup>41</sup>. As outlined in chapter four, the case studies have been selected, firstly because they perform well against the stated objectives of the welfare reform and secondly due to the availability of information. The first alternative approach is referred to as transition in terms of transition into lone parenthood and becoming the single provider for the family (section 6.1). The case study here is Norway. The second alternative to selecting by the age of the youngest child is to base the activation on the employability of the lone parent as is the case in Wisconsin (section 6.2). New Zealand on the other hand has reverted from an model based on age of child to one based on the discretion of case workers (section 6.3). The final alternative is the voluntary approach, i.e. where the decision whether to move into employment or not rests entirely with the lone parent family itself. Arguably, this approach had been in place in Britain prior to the introduction of work-focused interviews for IS claimants and the current welfare reform. However, the policy combination the first two Labour administrations had put in place in order to enable lone parents to move into work will not be discussed here as this has been done extensively elsewhere (Blundell 2003, Brewer 2007 and Millar 2005). Instead section 6.4 picks up on the suggestion made in the Gregg report (2008) of 'personalised conditionality'. He suggests that individuals should be divided into three groups according to their 'distance to work' but argues that there is lack of information currently on which to base this profiling. In the penultimate section of the chapter (section 6.5), the 'distance to work' of lone parents as operationalised in FACS is being investigated to see if it could form part of a set of characteristics and factors used for profiling. The final section (6.6) before the summary brings together the four different approaches identified in this and the previous chapter.

## **6.1 Transition into lone parenthood and to becoming the single provider**

As discussed in chapter two, selecting lone parents into work activation based on the age of their youngest child is the most common approach and the one that has been

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<sup>41</sup> As mentioned above, the focus is on comparing selection criteria which is why the first approach, general activation, has been omitted and age of child has been discussed in the previous chapter.

adapted by the current welfare-to-work reform in Britain. An alternative approach is to focus on the entry into lone parenthood and the potential consequences of this event in terms of upheaval for all family members involved as well as being or becoming the main earner of the new family unit. Therefore, the period when the latter become lone parents is treated as one requiring special support, in the form of financial assistance, which allows the lone parent to be a full-time parent and to prepare themselves to become the main earner. In practice, transition into lone parenthood is also limited by the age of the child, with social assistance being available to lone parents until their youngest child is three years and thereafter for one year after separation, until the youngest child is seven. The transition model has been implemented in Norway and France (OECD 2007). While lone parents have a very similar employment rate in both countries (incidentally around the level of the employment target set for this country), the poverty rate of lone parent households in work is substantially lower in Norway at three per cent compared to the ten per cent of poor working lone parent households in France (see table 6.2). Similarly, the overall child poverty rate is lower in Norway compared to France (four per cent compared to seven per cent respectively - table 6.2).

**Table 6.2 Employment rates and child poverty rates of lone parents in transition models**

In %	Norway	France
<b>Employment rate</b>	69	70
<b>Poverty rate of working lone parents households</b>	3	10
<b>Overall child poverty rate</b>	4	7

OECD 2007

The transition model will be examined in further detail taking Norway as a case study. Norway has been selected for two main reasons: Firstly, work activation reforms for lone parents were introduced only ten years ago and a similar policy strategy and rhetoric was used then, as is found in Britain today, namely that the investment in childcare and other support for working lone parents justifies the reciprocal activation of lone parents. Secondly, both the in work and overall poverty levels are lower than in France which is of relevance as one of the central aims of the current welfare-to-work reform is to reduce the level of child poverty in Britain.

Starting with brief overview of the numbers and characteristics of lone parents in Norway highlights one of the main differences between Norway and Britain in terms of the availability of data on lone parents. The political prominence of the issue of lone parents and employment in the 1990s in Norway meant that a couple of dedicated surveys were carried out (see Kjelstad and Ronsen 2004, Syltevik 2003 and Kjelstad 2000). However, lone parents have since not featured prominently on the political agenda or as a subject of empirical research. Instead, like in other Scandinavian countries, families tend to be treated as a group regardless of the number of parents in the household. Therefore, the majority of the data reported here comes from the dedicated survey in the early 1990s. In the early 1990s then the proportion of lone parents of all families in Norway was around one in five families with dependent children (Skevik 2001). One in ten lone parents was a lone father and of the lone mothers the majority were separated or divorced (52 per cent) or not married (43 per cent - which included a substantial group of ex-cohabitees) rather than widowed (6 per cent – Skevik 2001; p. 91, table 5.3). The majority of lone parents in Norway tended to have one child only (65 per cent), tended to be older themselves (47 per cent are over 35) and have older children (only 27 per cent have children under five – all in Skevig 2001; p. 91, table 5.3). The employment rate of lone parents increased during the 1990s from 64 to 69 per cent of all lone parents (Skevig 2001). The employment rate of mothers in couples was higher, but only 40 per cent of these mothers worked full-time (over 35 hours), compared to around half of the lone parents (all in Skevik 2001; p. 91

Norway is different to the other Scandinavian countries with regards to gender equality in that it has had an ambiguous relationship in particular towards women and employment (Leira 1992<sup>42</sup>). This ambivalent stance has historically also applied to lone parents and employment (Kjelstad 2000). The transition allowance prior to the 1998 reform reflected that ambiguity (see also Terum 1993 in Kjelstad 2000) as 'on the one hand the allowance has served as a guaranteed minimum income for lone parents with small children. On the other hand the original intentions have been for that the period for receiving an allowance should be temporary, allowing the recipient time to prepare and qualify for, and to seek, paid work.' (Kjelstad 2000; p. 346). In other words, the name transitional allowance aptly reflects the desired behavioural outcomes.

The notion of a 'transitional benefit' had been introduced in the first national piece of legislation in post-war Norway that focussed on lone parents, namely the 1964 Widow's

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<sup>42</sup> This argument seems to have been first made by Leira as it is attributed to her in almost all other work on the subject.

and Mother's Pension Act (Skevik 2001b). With the exceptions of widows over 60, the general expectation of lone parents was that they would move into or stay in work (Skevig 2001b and Kjelstad 2000). The rationale for introducing assistance to this group was that the lone parents in question were likely to include groups with little chance of finding employment in the labour market immediately, either because they had spent many years caring for their families or because they had not been providers before, e.g. because they were too young (see Skevik 2001b). The new benefit was income-related but not fully means-tested, i.e. earnings were taken into account but not capital and the provision included education and childcare allowances, as well as a one off payment to ease the initial transition (Skevik 2001). The initial act did not set a time limit for the transition benefit, but left both its duration and amount received up to the discretion of local boards (Skevik 2001b). This has changed since and prior to the 1998 reform, lone parents could receive the benefit until their youngest child reached the age of ten (Skevik 2007, Skevik 2001b and Kjelstad 2000). There have been several other changes to these arrangements, such as the introduction of an earnings related supplement for widows and the inclusion of widowers, divorced and separated lone mothers into the entitled group (see Skevik 2001b discussion). However, the main feature, namely, that lone parents with younger children can receive income replacement benefits when they first become lone parents has remained.

A question that periodically exercises policy-makers and politicians in several countries, namely that of how to establish whether a separation is genuine and therefore to prevent fraudulent claims, has also come up in Norway. In particular, when the transitional allowance was extended to separated and divorced lone parents in the 1970s (Skevig 2001b). After much debate it was decided that it should be the responsibility of the lone parent to inform the local boards if they started cohabiting. (Skevig 2001b). This situation remains today, in that lone parents submit a statement each year to the local board on their relationship status. This statement is essentially taken on trust though the penalties for fraud can be harsh, e.g. having to repay all the fraudulently acquired benefit or imprisonment<sup>43</sup>. As Skevig (2001b) argues: 'in the end, the majority of the Storting (*Norwegian parliament – the author*) agreed with the Government in that "meddling" and control with intimate personal matters was unacceptable, at least if it was done with respect to lone parents only, and rejected the cohabitation rule' (2001b; p. 146).

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<sup>43</sup> Personal communication with Anne Skevig Grodem in February 2009.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons for selecting Norway as a case study is their welfare-to-work reform in 1998. The three aims of the National Insurance Act (1998) were: 'to improve the economic situation for lone parents, to increase their capacity to make their own living through paid work, and to improve the quality of public services towards this group' (Syltevik 2003, p. 69). The reform contained six main elements:

- An overall time limit on social assistance receipt, in principle for three years or five years if the lone parent was in education or training,
- The maximum age of the child for a lone parent to be eligible for social assistance was lowered from 10 to 8,
- An activity requirement was introduced once the youngest child reached the age of three,
- Lone parents could receive social assistance for a year after separation, if their youngest child was under 10,
- The level of the transitional allowance was raised by more than ten per cent to ameliorate poverty among the recipients and
- A self-help and support organisation with the aim of empowering lone parents and providing mutual mentoring services was set up.

(all in Skevik 2007 and Syltevik 2003)

The main changes introduced by the welfare reform were the time-limit for the social assistance and the activity requirement once the youngest child is three years old. The emphasis has shifted to the transition to work with income provision limited to lone parents with very young children. The substantial increase in the employment rate of mothers over the previous decades and therefore the weakening of the traditional male breadwinner model are regarded as having influenced this reform (Ellingsaeter and Gulbrandsen 2007 and Kjelstad 2000). Moreover, during the late 1980s and 1990s there was considerable investment into childcare and an extension of parental leave policies were made and this formed part of the argument for the reform in 1998, which suggested that childcare responsibilities for older children were no longer seen as an obstacle to paid employment and that lone parents should "utilise" the offer of being able to combine work and parenting given the investment made in them by society (Skevik 2007). Others have argued that the welfare reform came as a result of a more fundamental shift from focusing on the parent child relationship to the ability of the mother to enter the labour market, i.e. a change from a "relational" to "individualised" motherhood (Syltevik 1998 in Kjelstad 2000).



In terms of the impact of the reform, Syltevik (2003) carried out a panel postal questionnaire with lone parents in Norway in 2000 and 2002 in order to estimate the effect on employment patterns of lone parents. According to this analysis, the reforms have led to a drop in the number of claimants and the employment rate of those lone parents who were no longer eligible for the transition allowance increased by twelve per cent between the two survey points (Syltevik 2003). However, in the absence of other data it is difficult to establish what percentage of this is due to the reforms and what is attributable to other factors, such as other policy changes or a buoyant economy. The main predictors for the labour market behaviour of lone parents prior to the reforms of 1998 were: whether they had been in work before becoming a lone parent, the age of the youngest child and the local unemployment rate (Kjelstad 2000 and Kjelstad and Ronsen 2003). Kjelstad and Rønsen (2004) argued that the reform seems to have had some effects, in terms of an increased likelihood of those eligible for the allowance to stay at home and those no longer eligible to move into employment. However, this effect was only observed for lone mothers and not for lone fathers (all in Kjelstad and Rønsen 2004). Furthermore, the authors analysed data from 1998, i.e. the year the reforms were introduced, and therefore it is not clear whether the above effects would still be observed more recently<sup>44</sup>.

Still, the employment rate of mothers in couples with very young children, i.e. between one and two years old, is relatively high in Norway at around 65 per cent though it is estimated that around a third of those mothers work atypical hours with the father taking care of the child (see Kjelstad and Ronsen 2002 and Lande 2001 in Ellingsaeter 2008). In contrast to the development of more lone parents with younger children staying at home after the changes to the transitional allowance, it is estimated that the cash-for-care reform introduced in the same year, which offers parents in couples with very young children a choice to be paid for looking after their children rather than using public childcare services, does not seem to have resulted in a decrease in the labour market activity of mothers (or fathers) in couples despite high take-up of the new benefit (Ellingsaeter 2008). Kjelstad has argued that the policies introduced in the late 1990s have 'pointed in two different directions for lone and married parents: towards a retrenchment in the economic rights of lone parents, and towards an extension of economic rights for not-lone parents (2000; 348). In other words, for one group the

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<sup>44</sup> A more recent reform, the Action Plan to Combat Poverty, introduced in 2002 which aim to provide additional services to disadvantaged groups such as lone parents and encouraged greater co-operation between the key organisations on state and municipal level is estimated to have some positive impact on the long-term unemployed but none for single parents (see Ellingsaeter 2008).

level of obligation has been increased while for the other, the level of choice over how and when to combine work and parenting<sup>45</sup>.

## **6.2 Selecting by employability**

The previous two approaches that have been discussed have been based on the family characteristics or circumstances of the lone parents, such as the age of their youngest child or the time since becoming a lone parent. 'Ability to work' is therefore defined by family circumstances. The employability approach to selecting lone parents into work activations differs from these approaches, in that it focuses more on the parent and their ability to find a job in the labour market.

Particular attention has been paid to the different welfare-to-work reforms in US by policy-makers and academics in Britain, because a range of different programmes were introduced and evaluated that enabled policy learning and also because it reflected the intended direction of social policy in Britain (see Cebulla et al 2005, Crisp and Fletcher 2008, design of ERAD as well as influence in New Deals). Perhaps the best known welfare-to-work programmes in the US are Riverside, Portland, and Wisconsin Works (among others Urban Institute 2006 and Cebulla et al 2005). Of those three, Wisconsin Works has been selected here as a case-study for two reasons: Firstly, because it has been one of the most successful examples of the different state adaptations in that the state of Wisconsin experienced the highest fall in welfare caseload of all states in the 1990s (Robles et al 2003, Nightingale and Mikelson 2000). This state is often viewed as an 'early leader' with regards to welfare reform, as it started introducing welfare-to-work reform in the late 1980s and had already introduced a number of substantial reforms before welfare as previously understood was curtailed (Cancian et al 2000). Secondly, the Wisconsin model has included an explicit employment ladder and therefore differs from most other approaches, in that entitlement and activity requirements can change regularly, often from one day to the next, and is only indirectly related to the ability of the lone parent to compete in the labour market.

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<sup>45</sup> While the reform of the transitional allowance passed by the minority left leaning government with the support of the traditional parties (Ellingsaeter 2007) was uncontroversial (Kjelstad 2000), the cash-for-care reform, introduced by the newly elected coalition of conservative parties was rather more so (Ellingsaeter 2007) reflecting the notion of gender equality being linked to participation in the labour market.

However, before discussing Wisconsin Works in more detail, the approach towards lone mothers in US as a whole will be outlined briefly by way of contextualisation. The introduction of Temporary Assistance for Families in Need (TANF), through the Personal Responsibility and Work and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, famously intended to 'end welfare as we know it'. The most important change for lone parents on social assistance was that a lifetime limit of social assistance receipt of five years when having worked and one of two years when having not worked, was introduced on a federal level and adopted by many states (see Waldfogel et al 2001, Cebulla et al 2005 and Urban Institute 2006 among others). The employment rate of lone parents across the US increased substantially throughout the 1990s. A number of studies have concluded that the increase has been due to a combination of a strong economy and policy changes (Greenberg 2003).

The Wisconsin Works programme, often referred to as W-2, was introduced in September 1997, just one year after the introduction of TANF (Waldfogel et al 2001)<sup>46</sup>. It uses an employment ladder to place new applicants and to enable existing clients to progress towards unsubsidised employment. The ladder has five steps (see figure 6.1) ranging from unsubsidised employment to not having to be available for work. There is an overall five year limit of social assistance receipt in Wisconsin (Goode et al 2001). Furthermore, there is a two year limit on the lower three tiers of the W-2 ladder, i.e. those where recipients receive cash benefits. Sanctions are applied in the form of strikes and if a client gets three strikes for not participating in a particular activity or fulfilling a requirement without good reason, he/she will be struck off that part of the programme forever, e.g. from being able to participate in jobs trials (all in Goode et al 2001).

Clients have to be assigned to one of the four strands within seven days of registering, although this can be extended to 30 days in exceptional circumstances (Goode et al 2001). Applicants get assigned case-workers, who are called Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs). In the first meeting with the applicant, which tends to last around one hour, the FEP has four tasks: to establish the eligibility of the applicant, to explain the way W-2 works, make an initial assessment and discuss an employability plan (Goode et al 2001).

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<sup>46</sup> Soon after the introduction of Wisconsin Works a number of evaluation studies were commissioned and most of them were published in the early noughts. However, since then the majority of the information available about the performance of the programme is based on administrative data.

**Figure 6.1 Wisconsin works placement ladder**

<b>Placement</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Unsubsidised employment</b>	Has no barriers that cannot be addressed through available services Physically able and wants to work 'Steady and/or recent work experience' Education/training background that enables him/her to compete in labour market
<b>Trial Job</b>	Physically able and wants to work but may need some flexibility during trial period Basic skills but insufficient work experience Experience – employer agrees to provide some training Has little or no recent work experience and little work history
<b>Community Service</b>	<i>Not ready for two placements above</i> Little or no work history and little 'evidence of reliable work habits' Patchy work history, frequently quitted themselves Lacks skills to get employment Physical or mental health problems, temporary crisis situation
<b>W-2 Transitions</b>	Health condition, assessed by medical professional Cares for other ill or disabled member of family Crisis situation: legal problems, family crisis, domestic violence, etc.
<b>Off ladder placements</b>	Minor parent/caretaker of infant (3months or less)/pregnant woman

Source: Wisconsin Works Manual release 08-02 (DCF 2008)

Community Service Jobs (CJS) were the most common tier placement with around 60 to 80 per cent of applicants assigned to them in the first three years (Robles et al 2003). Whilst the majority of placements were: customer services, housekeeping, office work and care work, the kind of employment varied within these settings substantially and therefore the skills gained by the participants also varied according to the agency involved (Robles et al 2003). Furthermore, the proportion of those assigned to education or training increased substantially in the early years of the programme (Robles et al 2003). The role of the FEP was crucial in terms of the perspective

participants took on their placement, e.g. whether they felt that their preferences and plans had been listened to and adhered to (Robles et al 2003). Community service jobs as part of work activation programmes have a long tradition in Wisconsin. For example, the New Hope project is based in Wisconsin. Both the design and the administration of W-2 built on the existing experience and involved some of the providers of W-2 having been involved in previous community service programmes (Robles et al 2003).

Caseworkers play a key role in Wisconsin Works through assigning individuals to the different tiers of the employment ladder. Arguably their role is similar to that of other professionals such as social workers and teachers in terms of mediating between the particular circumstances of an individual and the guidance produced on the basis of aggregated research. However, at least in Britain employment advisors are not required to have specific training like the other professionals mentioned nor is their status comparable. In terms of the performance of caseworkers in W2, Gooder et al (2001) suggest that there is variation in terms of the matching between the different agencies but not more than that which occurs between individual advisors. Furthermore, as assessments have to be made quickly because of high caseloads, advisors tend to make informal assessments mainly based on the level of education and previous work experience of the lone parent (Gooder et al 2001). Earlier evaluations suggested that caseworkers lacked a coherent tool to assess lone parents with multiple needs who are a long way from the labour market, although advisors are given the option of making a first assessment which allows for one that is more detailed later on (Gooder et al 2001). This tool, titled the Barrier Screening Test (BST), was introduced in 2003 with the aim of identifying potential barriers to employment as well as assessing the need for formal and more thorough assessments where appropriate (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005). It is meant to be used by FEPs in the first month of the participants' arrival and screens for: mental and physical health problems, trauma, drug and alcohol abuse, learning difficulties and domestic abuse (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005). However, its use has been mixed both between and within agencies and was used by just over half of the FEPs (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005; p.11). The barriers that were identified most frequently were: mental and physical health as well as having had traumatic experiences (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005; p.5). However, of those who took part in the BST and subsequently were deemed to need formal assessment, only just over a half received it (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005; p.21 - 22).

In terms of the caseload, participants in W-2 in 2003 had the following characteristics: 95 per cent were female, only five per cent were married, the vast majority of them lived in Milwaukee County (Milwaukee being the capital of Wisconsin) and of those the vast majority were Black. Regarding the children: one quarter were under one, three quarters were under six years old and the average number of children per claimant was 2.3. Just under half of participants had a high school diploma and around one tenth had qualifications beyond this stage (all in Wisconsin Department for Workforce Development Chartbook 2006). Because welfare caseloads had already been falling prior to the introduction of W-2 and given the strong labour market at the time, 'there was a growing sense that many of the recipients who found and retained employment quickly had done so and that the remaining caseload probably had lower skills and faced more complex barriers to employment' (Robles et al 2003: 10). Advisors have perceived an increase in the number and complexity of the barriers of the client group over the first two years of operations. This may in part explain the drop in assignments to the first tier and even the third tier and the related increase of assignments for the transition tier (Gooder et al 2001). The main barriers identified apart from health criteria were the lack of affordable childcare and transportation (Nightingale and Mikelson 2000).

With regards to the outcomes of W2, a mixed picture emerges. Three quarters of those leaving the programmes each year were in employment though the employment was not necessarily continuous (Nightingale and Mikelson 2000; ii), whilst a quarter of participants return within the same year of leaving (Wisconsin Department for Workforce Development 2006; 9). However, whilst the poverty rates of former participants decline over time, over half remain in poverty at any one time (Nightingale and Mikelson 2000; ii). As has been discussed above, the implementation of various aspects of the programmes has varied both between and within providers. Overall, it can be argued that W-2 is working well with regards to work activation, but less so with regards to employment retention and poverty reduction. In this context, the models that place greater priority on education and training, such as those of Portland and Riverside have tended to fare better (for example: Cebulla et al 2005). Workfare models are seen to be less effective for: people with barriers to work, in weak labour markets and where the focus on unpaid work interferes with training needs (Crisp and Fletcher 2008).

The caseload of Wisconsin Works FEPs is in some ways similar to that found in Britain, with a relatively high share of lone parents without qualifications and with young

children. Despite this, the decline in caseload in the Wisconsin case is impressive, although improvements in the child poverty rate are less so.

### **6.3 Activation based almost entirely on caseworker discretion**

Moving on to the discretion model, this is essentially based on the notion that the situation of each lone parent is different and that standardised criteria, such as the age of the youngest child or even employability characteristics, are not able to establish whether a lone parent is able to work or not. At the same time, the decision whether to be available for work or not is not left to the lone parent to be made. Instead the model relies on the detailed knowledge of caseworkers regarding the circumstances of each lone parent. That is to say, the discretion model relies on the practitioner to meditate the evidence in work activation. A recent OECD report (Carcillo and Grubb 2006) has called for a higher level of compulsion for lone parents in countries, such as Britain, and has commended the caseworker model as the one most likely to identify those lone parents who are able to work. The case study for this approach is New Zealand which has recently moved away from a stricter work activation regime to a caseworker approach.

New Zealand has been chosen as a case-study for two reasons: Firstly, because it introduced two subsequent reforms within the last ten years, initially introducing a work test for lone parents and later reversing that decision. The second reason is that New Zealand has carried out evaluation studies for both these reforms, which means that estimates about the effectiveness of each of these policies are available.

The employment rate of lone parents in New Zealand is low by international comparisons, standing at 50 per cent in 2001 (OECD 2007). Combined with an overall rate of 19 per cent of all families with children being jobless households, the activation of lone parents has become a major political concern (OECD 2004; p. 162). In 2004, of this 50 per cent, 30 per cent were working full-time and 20 per cent part-time (OECD 2004; p. 71, table 3.7) and overall, 24 per cent of children in New Zealand lived in lone parent families (OECD 2004; table 2.5, p. 38). On the whole, lone parents report worse health than mothers in couples (Worth and McMillan 2004), in particular with regards to social function and the impact of physical and emotional health on daily functioning (Worth and McMillan 2004). The children of recipients of the Domestic Purpose Benefit

(the equivalent of Income Support in the UK) are also likely to have significantly higher levels of ill-health and disability (O'Donovan et al 2004). The population of New Zealand is of considerable ethnic diversity and socio-economic conditions differ substantially between the two largest groups, namely those of European and those of Maori origin. The latter are more likely than people of European origin to: have low educational qualifications, become teenage parents and be lone parents and in 2004 they made up 40 per cent of recipients of the Domestic Purpose Benefit, the benefit for lone parents in New Zealand, and one third of unemployment benefit recipients (OECD 2004; p.37). Overall, 80 per cent of people living in New Zealand were of European origin, 15 per cent were Maori, seven per cent Pacific peoples and seven per cent were Asian according to the last census (MSD2003 in OECD 2004).

Lone parents who are not in employment can claim Domestic Purpose Benefit as well as an Accommodation Supplement, i.e. have their housing costs paid for. For families in work, the child tax credit and the family tax credit provide a top-up to earnings, although lone parents have to work at least 20 hours per week and couples at least 30 hours, to qualify (OECD 2004). Lone parents whose earnings go above 24 per cent of APW face a withdrawal rate of 70 per cent (OECD p.158). Domestic Purpose Benefit was initially introduced in 1968 as a discretionary, emergency measure for all lone mothers. Five years later it became a means-tested statutory benefit and was extended to lone fathers (Goodger 1998). At that time it was also extended to women whose children were no longer dependent, but whose earnings capacity had been negatively affected by caring for their children previously and to carers (Goodger 1998).

In 1996 a work-test for lone parent recipients of the Domestic Purpose Benefits (DPB) was introduced. From then on, lone parents whose youngest child was 14 or over had to look for part-time work or training for at least 15 hours per week (Goodger and Larose 1999). This was increased to looking for full-time work of at least 30 hours in 1998, with lone parents whose youngest child was between six and 13 years old having to look for part-time work and those with children under six years had to take part in work-preparation measures. Lone parents whose child was under six had to attend annual 'work preparation interviews' (MSD 2002).

'These measures represent a change in the Governments' work expectation of sole mothers. They have been motivated by long-standing concerns about the rising numbers of sole parents and children dependent on the domestic purpose benefit, the rising fiscal burden of benefit provision, and the incentive effects of the benefit system



on sole parents' level of employment' (Goodger and Larose 1999; p. 2). The employment rate of lone parents declined between 1976 and 1991, from 40 per cent to 27 per cent. Over the same period, the employment rate of mothers in couples rose from 39 per cent to 58 per cent (Goodger 1998, 23, table 1). COMPASS, a voluntary programme aimed at helping lone parents enter training, education or work, was introduced in 1994 (all in Goodger 1998). There is no maintenance disregard for recipients of the DPB, but emergency maintenance payments are possible by the state. Family support, similar to family allowance in the UK, is paid to all families and a childcare subsidy was introduced, although public provision of childcare had been rudimentary for a long time and reserved for those in most need (Goodger 1998). The penalties for non-participation were benefit sanctions. For the first and second non-compliance action, benefit was cut until re-compliance was established and a third offence led to benefit entitlement being stopped for thirteen weeks. In the case of lone parents, benefit was only cut by 50 per cent when these sanctions were applicable (MSD 2002). The number of lone parents leaving DPB increased substantially after the introduction of the work test (Dol and MSD 2001), especially for those whose youngest child was 14 or over, because they now faced a full-time work test.

The decrease in caseload also occurred in the case of lone parents with younger children. The latter could be interpreted as a 'signalling effect', i.e. lone parents with younger children move towards work in anticipation of the work test once their youngest child reaches the age of 14. It is not clear to what extent these developments were the result of the policy reform or due to the general improvement of labour market conditions at the time, or a combination of both. However, the evaluation studies did expose a number of ongoing issues, in terms of the uneven implementation of the reform, namely:

- the preoccupation of the case-workers with lone parents facing the full-time work test,
- the importance of training and education for enabling lone parents to find jobs that are better paid and therefore sustainable,
- the continuing fragility of arrangements once work status has been gained, in particular with regards to childcare,
- lone parents were most likely to be better off in work if they worked full-time, had low childcare costs and little or no debts,
- security of income was a concern for lone parents and therefore most of those moving into part-time work stayed on DPB and

- around a quarter working non-traditional hours and another quarter got temporary positions (all in DoL and MSD 2001).

In 2003, the work-test regime was abandoned. According to an evaluation report: 'in particular, the work test process was viewed as not sufficiently flexible to take into account the complexity of sole parents' lives, their different starting positions in relation to paid employment and the demands of balancing work and parental care responsibilities' (MSD 2003; p. 2). The centrepiece of the new reform was Enhanced Case Management (ECM). The aims of the ECM are to provide more holistic support that takes a broader view and interest in lone parents' life, rather than focusing mainly on employment related aspects, as before. More specifically, the aims are to: identify barriers early, encourage planning and goal setting based around a Personal Development and Employment Planning process (PDEP), 'to allow recipients to make decisions about the balance of paid work and parental responsibilities', to continue to provide support after the transition into work, to encourage a mix of part-time work and benefit receipt and finally, to adapt the support of case workers in a way that mirrors some of the traditional Maori support networks (MSD 2002; 3).

Sanctions for non-compliance, in terms of not participating with 'good and sufficient reason' in the drawing up and implementation of the PDEP, still apply and are set at 20 per cent of benefits for four weeks and then 50 per cent if the non-compliance continues (MSD 2002; 4, table 1). The ECM was introduced alongside the increased specialisation of case-managers and a reduction of their case load, from around 200 to 300 lone parents per manager, to around 150 (MSD 2001; 4, table 1). The 'Working for Families' reform introduced in 2004 aims to tackle this by raising the family supplement and replacing the Child Tax Credit with a more generous in work benefit, as well as increasing the subsidy for childcare and increasing the coverage of the accommodation supplement (OECD 2004). It has been argued, however, that the availability and level of the DPB as well as the offsetting of other benefits with increased earnings, has maintained a poverty trap for lone parents (OECD 2004).

The employment rate of lone mothers started to grow in the 1990s though at a slower rate than that of mothers in couples (Goodger 1998). Goodger and Larose (1999) argued that the policy changes in the early and mid 1990s will have had a positive effect on the employment rate. However, other factors such as the slower growth of lone parenthood, the increased age of lone parents and children as well as disparate impact of the economic situation on the Maori and the low skilled, i.e. they have a

higher likelihood to lose their jobs in recession and a higher likelihood to re-enter the job market in economic recovery periods also play a part in explaining the employment pattern of lone parents in New Zealand.

In the context of international comparisons, the employment gap between mothers in couples and lone mothers in NZ is one of the widest (Bradshaw et al 1996) and the reasons for this are not clear. Some have argued that this is due the lack of childcare and the high cost of childcare, where it is available (Singley 2003 and Bradshaw et al 1996). Others have posited that the employment gap between mothers in couples and lone mothers is likely to be affected more strongly by the labour market disadvantages of the Maori which make up a substantial proportion of lone parents in New Zealand and less so by the incentive structure of the tax and benefit system (Whiteford 1997). The factors associated with employment of lone parents are: age of child and level of education of parents (Goodger and Larose 1999). Lone parents themselves cite the following barriers to employment: the preference to stay at home, in particular when the children are very young, along with the cost and accessibility of childcare for those who would like to use it. Other important barriers are the financial disincentive to work part-time for lone parents and the effect of ill-health of either the parent and/or the child (all in Singley 2003). Finally, other barriers mentioned are: the 'transition costs of moving into work, debt, non-family-friendly' employers, lack of information about employment assistance, perceived employer discrimination, and anxiety and lack of confidence' (Singley 2003; p. 47).

It could be argued that the direction of travel of policies regarding lone parents in New Zealand is in the opposite direction to that of Great Britain and arguably many other OECD countries. However, the emphasis on the role of the caseworker to be able to provide more holistic support chimes with recent OECD reviews of work activation programmes (Carcillo and Grubb 2006) and might also suit the profile of lone parents who are more likely to have multiple disadvantages with regards to moving into employment compared to mothers in couples, in particular lack of educational qualifications and ill-health in the family. The similarities to Great Britain, with the exception of the ethnic dimension, are striking, in terms of the characteristics of the lone parent population and the change from a benefit that was available until the youngest child was 16, to the introduction of a work test based on the age of the youngest child. One key difference is that the work test was introduced in economically favourable times in New Zealand, when it is traditionally easier for people at the fringes

of the labour market to enter employment. It remains to be seen whether this bodes well for the reform in Britain introduced in a rather different economic climate.

## **6.4 Voluntary model**

Finally, there is the voluntary model, which arguably could be described as the approach taken in Great Britain prior to the introduction of compulsory work-focussed-interviews and of the current welfare-to-work reform. Arguably though it is a voluntary model by default rather than design. As outlined in chapter two, the eligibility rules of social assistance covering all lone parents with children under 16 were introduced at a particular point in British history when the governments at the time perceived to have been partly responsible for the growth in lone parenthood. This regulation has stayed in place until last year. Yet, the underlying conceptualisation of lone parenthood in this case is that the situation of each parent is different and that the parents themselves are best placed to decide when they can move into employment. In other words, the selection is not made based on some fixed criteria or the assessment of a caseworker, but solely based on the aspirations and decisions of the lone parent themselves.

Britain has been chosen as a case study as it was one of the few countries without employment obligations for lone parents until recently. Until the implementation of the current welfare-to-work reform Britain could arguably be described as having had a voluntary model, i.e. where lone parents are eligible for social assistance until their children are 16 and the decision whether to work at all and if so, for how many hours is therefore arguably their choice. However, whilst there was no requirement of lone parents, prior to the introduction of WFIs, to participate in work-related-activities or look for work, this did not mean that staying at home was well supported financially by the government. Receiving social assistance benefits in Britain has usually meant living in relative poverty.

Both the policy measures introduced by the respective New Labour governments to facilitate employment and the increase in the employment rate of lone parents have been discussed elsewhere in this thesis (see chapter two). The key points with regards to the increase in the employment rate of lone parents since 1997 are that about half of the ten per cent increase has been attributed to the policy changes and the remainder to the favourable conditions and the changes in the composition of lone parents (for a discussion of the various evaluations, see Gregg et al 2007). The New Deal for Lone Parents has been successful in enabling lone parents to move into employment but

participation is voluntary. Only a small proportion of lone parents are registering for the New Deal and some argue that they are closer to work which means the employment entry for NDLP would probably not be sustainable if it was made compulsory. At the same time, the issue of retention has been raised and it is claimed that the employment target could be met if the employment exit rate of lone parents was brought down to the average exit rate for the working age population as a whole (Evans et al 2004). The vast majority of lone parents want to work according to repeated surveys though not necessarily immediately. Qualitative research supports the notion of lone parents being orientated towards work but that it has to fit with their parenting preferences and that this often informs their own timetable for moving into work as well as factors such as previous work experience and their level of confidence (see chapter four for a full discussion of the research).

In his recent report, which has influenced the reform going through parliament as we speak, Gregg (2008) claims that claimants should be profiled according to their distance to work, i.e. their ability to move into the labour market. However, he continues that at present, the required information to carry out such profiling for lone parents is not available (Gregg 2008). The limitations of previous research to inform policy-making in this area have been discussed in chapter four. FACS in particular has been amended more recently to elicit more information about lone parents movements towards and decisions about moving into employment (Collins et al 2007). However, the new questions have only been asked from 2006 onwards and this data is not yet available. Therefore, this analysis can only draw on the direct questions after the timetable of lone parents for moving into work.

Underlying the 'distance to work' concept as operationalised in most of the government commissioned surveys and therefore also FACS is the idea that lone parents who are not in paid employment can be placed on a continuum according to their own timescale for moving into paid work (see Bradshaw and Millar 1991, Woodfield and Finch 1999, Lewis et al. 2000 and Kasparova et al. 2003). As discussed in chapter four, analysis so far has tended to divide lone parents into three rather uneven groups: The 'work ready' and the 'never work' group are both relatively small and homogenous and, as one would expect, differ in their characteristics. The 'work ready' group mainly have characteristics that are associated with employment such as having qualifications and recent work experience and are more likely to move into work within the next year while the 'never work' group is more likely to be suffering from ill-health and to have been on Income Support (IS) for a long time (see Kasparova et al 2003). However, this leaves

the largest group, those lone parents who are planning to move into work but not just yet. This group is relatively heterogeneous in terms of its characteristics and it is also difficult to predict movements into work for this group.

The question used for the purpose of this analysis has been refined by combining the set of questions about whether and when lone parents are planning to look for work with the question about whether they are expecting to be in work in two years time or not (see appendix 6). The combined new variable has been called work anticipation and consists of six instead of the usual three groups:

- Now and expecting to work
- Weeks/ months and expecting to work
- Year or two and expecting to work
- Some time in the future and expecting to work
- Some time in the future and not expecting to work and
- Not planning to look and not expecting to work

The work anticipation groups will be included in the analysis as a proxy for voluntary approaches. Existing research suggests that the work ready group tends to move into work quickly and the 'never work' group tends to stay out of work but that both the composition and the movement towards the labour market of the work postpone group is less clear. By specifying the timescale of lone parents in the work postpone group and sub-dividing it, the hope is that the groups are now more homogeneous. If they are, the aim is to examine to what extent lone parents' own timetable coincides with their actual labour market entry and whether it could form the basis for at least part of any profiling in the future.

## ***6.5 Comparing the different selection models***

In this chapter four different models of selecting lone parents into work activation have been discussed. They are compared with the age of child approached and summarised in figure 6.2. The five different approaches base the selection of lone parents into work activation on the age of the youngest child, transition status, employability, caseworker decision or are voluntary. It can be argued that the level of focus on lone parents and even their agency to influence whether they are looking for employment is increasing

towards the bottom of the table. The first approach, selecting lone parents on the basis of the age of their youngest child, is defining 'ability to work' based on the age of the youngest child. This approach is in place in many countries where lone parents are financially supported to stay at home while the children are very young and then required to move into the labour market when the children reach usually the age of three because of the assumed effects on the development of the child. Development in this case refers to cognitive and behavioural development, which is measured in terms of school performance and the stranger test. According to the current regulations in place in Britain, the characteristics and work orientation of the lone parent do not play a part in the assessment whether a lone parent is seen as 'able to work' and therefore transferred to JSA. The exception to this is if the lone parent has multiple disadvantages. However, those disadvantages are more on a par with the Wisconsin Works regulations, i.e. refer more to a temporary crisis (such as being homeless or addicted to drugs – Pleace and Bretherton 2006) than an accumulation of characteristics that are likely to make the entry into the labour market more difficult as in the concept by Berthoud (2003a), which has been applied in the previous chapter.

The transition approach assumes that all lone parents will move into work but that some may need a period of time to adjust to being the sole parent and sole breadwinner. The two countries, France and Norway, which have introduced transition models, have high employment rates for mothers and lone mothers backed up by a more extensive service and benefits infrastructure than is the case in Britain. In other words, the transition approach is based on the assumption of high labour market participation of mothers generally and lone mothers in particular. The age cut-off points for eligibility in the transition model also suggest an underlying assumption of either the majority of entries into lone parenthood taking place when the children are young or at least, that the parents only need this transition period if the children involved are young. It does not leave room for alternative circumstances such as lone parents whose children are older than seven requiring a transition period or not being able to work due to multiple disadvantages. While all the other approaches tend to have an explicit or implicit age cut off for lone parents with very young children, the W2 model is focused much more on the lone parents in terms of their ability to compete in the labour market. In other words, 'ability to work' is modelled as ability to obtain a job and logically, lone parents who are seen as able to obtain a job when they sign up with the respective agencies are then placed in different programmes which are meant to provide them with the required work experiences to be able to obtain a job.

The caseworker approach is arguably able to take into account both labour market as well as personal factors of the lone parent families when deciding whether a lone parent should be available for work while at the same time providing the lone parents with information and advice about in work benefits. It is arguably the most flexible and holistic approach. However, it relies heavily on highly trained caseworkers who are in agreement with the guidance they receive on what to take into account when deciding on whether a lone parent should be available for work or not.

Finally, the voluntary approach which gives agency to the lone parents themselves by trusting them to decide when it is best for them and their family to move into the labour market. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the focus is on the timescale of lone parents for moving into work for the purpose of potentially informing any profiling of lone parents.



**Figure 6.2 Different policy models in practice**

<b>Selection criteria</b>	<b>Selection by</b>	<b>Characteristics of model</b>	<b>Social assistance eligibility</b>	<b>Duration/exit from social assistance<sup>47</sup></b>	<b>Countries</b>
<b>Child development</b>	Age of youngest child	Entitlement to social assistance is based on the age of the youngest child only. The age cut off varies between countries.	Being a lone parent with a young child	When youngest child reaches age cut off point	Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Australia
<b>Transition</b>	Transition into lone parenthood and to sole provider status	Social assistance can be claimed for up to one year after separation until child is three or for one year after separation until the child is seven	Separation from partner or becoming a parent without a partner	One year after the separation or once the youngest child is three	Norway and France
<b>Employability</b>	Ability to find job in the labour market	Lone parents are placed on employment ladder with different levels of requirements and support according their employability	Being a lone parent and out of work	Two years	Wisconsin Works/ US
<b>Caseworker</b>	Discretion of caseworker	Decision whether work is appropriate is taken by caseworker	Being a lone parent	Caseworker, decision or when child turns 16	New Zealand
<b>Voluntary</b>	Lone parent decision	Enabling policies but no compulsion to be available for work	Being a lone parent	When child turns 16 or voluntarily before	UK until recently

<sup>47</sup> In all these models lone parents would also lose their entitlement to social assistance upon re-partnering and/or when moving into work of over a specified number of hours.

## **CHAPTER 7: Alternative policies for activating lone parents**

The analysis in chapter five focused on the target group for the forthcoming reform, i.e. lone parents whose youngest child is seven years or older. It showed that the employment target of 70 per cent would be just met, even if all lone parents in this group were to move into employment. However, lone parents in the target group are much more likely to have multiple disadvantages than those in work, which is likely to slow down their progress in achieving employed status. In other words, the forthcoming reform, based on the age of the youngest child, is unlikely to be sufficient in the medium term to meet the employment target, given the characteristics and higher number of multiple disadvantages amongst the lone parents in the target group. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, targeting lone parents by the age of the youngest child is only one of several options. Alternative policies are to target lone parents by employability criteria or linked to the length of their lone parenthood status.

This chapter considers three of the four alternative approaches using different targeting criteria,

1. Targeting lone parents according to the length of time they have been a lone parent,
2. Targeting lone parent based on their employability and
3. A voluntary approach.

The caseworker approach, which has also been discussed in the previous chapter, is difficult to replicate using this data set, as it does not include the assessment of advisors. Therefore, only the first three models will be examined, by applying the same analysis parameters as in chapter five. That is, the aim of this chapter is to examine whether any, and if so which, of the alternative policy models are likely to perform better in the British context than the forthcoming reform, in terms of their potential impact on the employment target and the likelihood of lone parents in those groups to move into employment based on their characteristics and number of disadvantages. Actual policies in other countries are used as examples as discussed in chapter four. The potential impact of the different targeting criteria is estimated, and this is followed by a discussion of the characteristics of the lone parents in the targeted group. Subsequently the multiple disadvantage index developed by Berthoud (2003a) is applied. As in the chapter five, only those characteristics are used, which have either

been clearly identified as being linked to non-employment or are part of the targeting criteria of the policy models discussed.

### ***7.1 Targeting lone parents by their transition status***

An alternative to selecting lone parents for employment by the age of their youngest child is to select by transition into lone parenthood status. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the concept of transition refers to the phase when an individual becomes a lone parent, i.e. as a result of separating from a partner or from giving birth to a child without being in a relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of transition is usually combined with the age of the youngest child. The rationale for allowing lone parents to claim social assistance during this transition periods is based on assumptions that both the parent and the children involved may need time to adjust which can include moving into the labour market (see previous chapter). A transition approach has been adopted in both France and Norway. The Norwegian model has been selected as the case study for the purposes of this analysis. In Norway lone parents are eligible for social assistance until their youngest child is three or for one year after separation, up until their youngest child is seven. This approach has been modelled below using the same data as in chapter five.

A new variable has been created to mirror the Norwegian approach, i.e. to include lone parents whose youngest child is under 3 or whose youngest child is under seven and who became a lone parent within the last two years. This is likely to result in a slight overestimate<sup>48</sup>. As the focus of the analysis is on the group that is selected for activation, the group of interest therefore are those lone parents who are not in transition. This group has been termed '**post-transition**' and consists of all lone parents whose youngest child is over three years or older and who have not separated from their partner in the last two years. Overall, nearly a third of lone parents were in the transition group and just under two thirds in the 'post-transition' group in 2005.

Lone parents who have split up in the last two years and whose youngest child is three years old or older constitute only a small group of the post-transition group (eight per

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<sup>48</sup> As explained in the evidence-based-appraisal chapter the time after separation has been increased from the usual one year to two years, in order to allow for respondents being interviewed at different times during the year. Both relationship histories and panel data have been used to derive the length of separation variable. Information about relationship history and when a respondent separated from their partner is found in two different places in the FACS, according to whether a respondent joined the study in that year or has been interviewed before.

cent of all lone parents with children three years or older – see table A7.1 in appendix seven). The majority have been lone parents for more than two years or only have children aged seven or above. In other words, the post-transition group is very similar in its composition to the group of lone parents discussed towards the end of chapter five, namely lone parents whose youngest child is three years old or older. Yet, the selection criteria only overlap in part. Therefore, this is treated as a separate approach but only a summary of the analysis of the post-transition group has been included in this chapter.

The employment rate of lone parents in the ‘post-transition’ group was higher than the total average of 58 per cent, at 62 per cent, as would be expected, given that it does not include lone parents with children under three (see table 7.1). By contrast and also consistent with expectations, the employment rate of lone parents in the ‘transition’ group was low, at 42 per cent (table 7.1).

**Table 7.1: Work status of lone parents by transition status**

Column %	Transition status		
	Transition	Post transition	All lone parents
Work status			
Working any hours	42	62	58
On IS	50	33	36
Other	8	5	6
All	100	100	100
Weighted base	461	1119	1720

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

In terms of the overall size, lone parents in the ‘post-transition’ group on Income Support constitute 22 per cent of all lone parents with dependent children compared to 13 per cent of lone parents in the transition group (table 7.2).

**Table 7.2: Work status of all lone parents by transition**

Total %	Transition status		
	Transition	Post-transition	All
<b>Work Status</b>			
In work	11	40	58
<b>On IS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>36</b>
Other	2	3	6
All	27	65	100
Weighted base	759	1119	1720

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 7.3 shows the potential impact the successful activation of all or parts of the 'post-transition' group would have on the various targets if the transition model was to be applied in Britain. Even though 62 per cent of this group are already in employment, this group is relatively big and those on IS make up 22 per cent of all lone parents. Therefore, if all lone parents on IS who are in the 'post-transition' group were to move into employment, the overall employment rate would increase by those 22 per cent from the current 58 per cent to 80 per cent. In other words, in the best case scenario the employment target would be exceeded and it would suffice if only 66 per cent of lone parents in the post-transition group moved into employment. Even so, the increase would not be sufficient to meet the required employment rate to achieve the child poverty target (all in table 7.3 below).

**Table 7.3: Comparison of different activation scenarios for ‘post-transition’ group**

In per cent	‘Post-transition’
<b>Employment increases and the employment target</b>	
Current employment rate of all lone parents	58%
Increase in overall employment rate in best case scenario	+22%
Overall employment rate in best case scenario	80%
<b>Required employment rate to meet targets</b>	
Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for employment target scenario	66%
Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for child poverty target scenario	>100%

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with older children on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Given the aforementioned overlap between the ‘post-transition’ group and the group of lone parents with younger and older children examined in chapter five, only the distribution of disadvantages will be presented by way of summary. Also, as data prior to 2002 less complete in terms of derived variables, and derived panel variables such as length of separation in particular, it is difficult to identify the ‘post-transition- group in the 2002 and 2003 dataset. Therefore, the steady-state analysis has also been omitted.

Lone parents in the ‘post-transition’ group on IS are much more likely to have one or more disadvantages, than those lone parents in this group who are working. While 64 per cent of lone parents in work in the post-transition group have no disadvantages this

compares to only 18 per cent of those on IS (table 7.4). Similarly, around six per cent of lone parents in work have two or more disadvantages compared to 50 per cent of those on IS (table 7.4).

**Table 7.4: Number of disadvantages for lone parents in the ‘post- transition’ group by their work status**

<i>column %</i>	<i>Work status</i>		
	Working	On IS	All
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>			
None	64	18	50
One	29	32	30
Two	6	27	13
Three or more	*	23	8
All	100	100	100
Weighted Base	694	372	1720

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents in the post-transition group on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

To summarise, as expected, the group of lone parents ‘post-transition’ on IS have emerged as being similar to those whose youngest child with children three and over in terms of the number and distribution of disadvantages. That is, there was a clear difference in terms of the number of disadvantages between those who were on IS and those who were working, with the former being much more likely to be experiencing a higher number of disadvantages than those in work.

The potential impact on the employment target is again very similar to that of lone parents with younger children. A completely successful activation of lone parents with older and younger children would increase in the overall employment rate of lone parents by 23 per cent (see table 5.12 in chapter five). This compares to an increase of

22 per cent for a successful activation of the 'post-transition' group<sup>49</sup> (see table 7.3). In both cases the employment target would be met in the best case scenario. However, the difference between the two approaches is that the transition approach would allow lone parents to claim social assistance for a limited period immediately after the breakdown of a relationship even if their youngest was child over two years old. Given that the vast majority of lone parents are women and as women are still much more likely to reduce their working hours after becoming a parent than men, this transition period would allow for the new lone parents to get used to both being a lone parent but also to either be moving into work or potentially increasing their hours as the new main breadwinner of the family. For these reasons as well as the potential upset for the whole family of the separation, it has been argued that this approach is better at accommodating the complexity of lone parents' lives at this particular point, though the timing and genuineness of separations may be difficult to establish at times (see chapter six for a detailed discussion of these points).

So far, the approaches discussed have been largely based on the age of the youngest child. In the current context of expansion and personalisation of work activation in Britain, a recent welfare reform discussion paper (Gregg 2008) suggested that the age cut off should be lowered to one and be supplemented with an assessment of the distance to work of individual lone parents. This has been taken up in the Welfare Reform Bill to the extent that only lone parents with children up to one are exempt from any activity requirement (DWP 2009). It is less clear how to identify said distance to work (Gregg 2008). Yet, it could be argued that some existing approaches such as the Wisconsin model are effectively sub-dividing lone parents according to their distance to the labour market. Therefore, the following section is an attempt to map the Wisconsin Works schemes onto the British context to examine what group of lone parents would be selected for work activation.

## ***7.2 Targeting lone parents according to Wisconsin Works***

Wisconsin Works, as discussed in chapter six, is probably one of the most prominent and contentious of the numerous American welfare-to-work schemes. The contention lies in the lifetime limit on social assistance and also in the early targeting of lone parents. That is, once the youngest child reaches the age of 18 months, lone parents

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<sup>49</sup> The one percent difference is due to the eight per cent of lone parents who have separated in the past two years and are therefore in the 'transition' group even though their children are three or older.



are already targeted for employment. They are seen as available for employment and consequently subdivided into three groups based on their distance to work. This distance to work is defined as ability to compete in the labour market and is measured in terms of the: work motivation, qualifications, time away from the labour market and the health status of lone parents<sup>50</sup>. The three groups are intended to form an employment ladder which lone parents can climb up as they get closer to the labour market.

The first group, the so called 'work ready', are those who are able to compete in the labour market. As the term 'work ready' has been applied in another context, for the purposes of this research this group is referred to as the '**labour market**' group. The next group, '**job trial**', are those who are not yet able to compete in the labour market and are therefore offered job placements in order to increase their employability. The group includes those lone parents who are physically able, want to work and who have some basic skills and little or no work experience. The third group, '**community support**', are offered supported employment, as they are not yet ready for job trials. This group includes lone parents who have a disability or impairment and who do not have any qualifications<sup>51</sup>. Those who are not seen as employable, for now, are those 'in transition', i.e. those who are temporarily not able to work, owing to a crisis in their life such as: homelessness, substantial caring responsibilities for a relative and/or their own ill health. In order to avoid confusion with the other transition group discussed above this group is referred to as '**temporary**' here. The final group are lone parents who are placed 'off ladder', namely those whose youngest child is under 18 months old. They do not have to be available to work until the child is 18 months when they will be profiled and allocated to a group irrespective of the age of their child.

The Wisconsin Works manual recommends that the majority of lone parents should be placed in the group closest to the labour market (W2 manual). Therefore the W2 criteria have been applied in such a way that half of lone parents on IS with dependent children under 16 would indeed fall into the 'labour market' category, i.e. those who are able to compete in the labour market (see first column of table 7.5)<sup>52</sup>. Seventeen per

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion of the W2 employment ladder, please refer to chapter six while the translation of said ladder into the available FACS variables is presented in chapter four.

<sup>51</sup> Please see the evidence-based-appraisal chapter for details of which FACS variables have been used to derive the different groups.

<sup>52</sup> According to some of the evaluation literature on W2, the majority of claimants seem to be placed on the Community Service rung of the ladder (W2 manual). However, as the implementation of the guidance is difficult to fully establish and replicate, the decision has been

cent would be grouped as ready for Job Trials and 19 per cent for Community Support placements, whilst twelve per cent would be in the 'Temporary'<sup>53</sup> group and three per cent in the 'off ladder' group. As has been discussed in the evidence-based-appraisal chapter, identifying lone parents in those groups is problematic as FACS does not collect information about drug abuse and by its nature the sampling does not capture homelessness particularly well. Given this together with the small based numbers of the last two groups and the fact that they are not on the W2 ladder, i.e. temporarily exempt from work activation, they are not included in the subsequent analysis. Column two of table 7.5 outlines the overall size of the respective groups. For example, the target group for work activation in the W2 model, i.e. those in the '**labour market**' group, makes up 18 per cent of all lone parents (second column of table 7.5).

**Table 7.5: Applying Wisconsin Works criteria to lone parents on IS in Great Britain**

<i>Column%</i>	<i><b>Within lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS (column %)</b></i>	<i><b>Within all lone parents with dependent children (total %)</b></i>
<b>Wisconsin Works</b>		
Labour market	50	18
Job Trial	17	6
Community Support	19	7
Temporary	12	4
Off ladder	3	1
All	100	36
Weighted base	622	622

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children on Income Support. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Turning to the potential for meeting the employment target, table 7.6 shows the impact that a successful activation of the various groups would have. If all lone parents in the

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made to stick to the guidance with regards to allocating lone parents to groups on the employment ladder.

<sup>53</sup> FACS does not ask about drug use and as with most surveys does not tend to pick up any homeless people. Therefore, based on this survey lone parents are placed in this group if they receive income replacement disability benefits or caring benefits.

'labour market' group were activated, the overall employment rate would increase by 18 per cent to 76 per cent and therefore slightly surpass the employment target of 70 per cent. In fact, if two thirds of lone parents in the 'labour market' group were to move into employment the 70 per cent target would be reached. The 'work trial' and 'community service' groups are smaller as advised in the W2 manual guidelines and therefore would only add seven per cent each to the overall employment rate and thus, by themselves would not be enough to meet the employment target.

**Table 7.6 The potential impact on the employment target of applying Wisconsin Works criteria**

	In %
<b>Employment increases and the employment target</b>	<b>Labour market</b>
Current employment rate of all lone parents	58
Increase in overall employment rate in best case scenario	+18
Overall employment rate in best case scenario	76

#### **Required employment rate to meet targets**

Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for employment target scenario	66
Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for child poverty target scenario	>100

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents with dependent children. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

As mentioned above, lone parents are placed on the W2 employment ladder according to characteristics and attitudes such as: their motivation to work, their health, qualifications and time away from the labour market. Taking account of both the characteristics and the number of disadvantages is difficult, as there is some overlap in

terms of the characteristics that have been included in both. In fact, three out of the five characteristics used for the multiple disadvantage score are also part of the W2 assessment, namely health, qualifications and time away from the labour market. In other words, the multiple disadvantage score is more of a confirmation of the ladder placement than an indicator of disadvantage in its own right. However, in order to compare the W2 employment ladder to the other policy approaches, the analysis has been run regardless. Table 7.7, unsurprisingly, shows much lower levels of multiple disadvantages in the 'labour market' group than the two others with 49 per cent of the lone parents in this group not having any disadvantages and only around 15 per cent having two or more disadvantages (see table 7.7).

**Table 7.7: Number of disadvantages for lone parents according to W-2**

<i>Column %</i>	<b><i>W2 employment ladder</i></b>			
	Labour market	Job trial	Community Service	All
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>				
None	49	*	*	25
One	34	36	30	32
Two	15	34	31	25
Three or more	*	27	39	19
All	100	100	100	100
Weighted Base	308	107	117	623

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

To summarise, the employment ladder within Wisconsin Works is based on employability criteria, with only a small element of targeting based on the age of youngest child. If all lone parents who are grouped as able to compete in the labour market (the 'labour market' group) were to move into employment, the overall employment would increase to 80 per cent and therefore, only two thirds of this group would need to move into employment for the employment target to be met.

The levels of aggregated disadvantages vary considerably between the W2 employment ladder groups. However, this is partly due to the same characteristics being used to sub-divide lone parents for the W2 employment ladder and as a measure of multiple disadvantages such as levels of qualifications, time away from the labour market and ill health. The variables for W2 have been constructed slightly differently from those of the multiple disadvantages in order to mirror the W2 criteria as closely as possible. For example, while I am using self-reported ill-health in the family that affects employment for the summation of disadvantages, the W2 manual (WDCF 2009) stipulates receipt of disability benefits as measure of ill health. However, there is still considerable overlap and it is therefore not surprising that the 'labour market' group emerged as least likely to have any disadvantages, compared to the other two W-2 defined groups.

Profiling according to particular characteristics is one option for selecting lone parents into work activation. However, according to much of the research on lone parents not in work, most lone parents not only want to work but also have their own timetable for moving into work (see chapter three). The timing is determined by a range of factors, the most prominent of which is the aim to combine parenting and working rather than thinking about moving into work by itself. In much of the survey research though, distance to work is asked as a direct question that focuses on work only.

### ***7.3 Profiling distance to work for lone parents***

The majority of lone parents are apparently keen to move into work (see Philo et al 2009 for the most recent figures) and this has been used as a justification for policy reform until recently (see chapter two). However, many are not ready to move into work yet and the lack of the affordable of childcare, financial concerns and ill-health, have been given as the main barriers to moving into employment (Kasparova et al 2003 and Millar and Ridge 2001). As discussed in previous chapters, an argument has been made for profiling lone parents to assess their readiness for employment in terms of their individual circumstances. According to some commentators, however, the data to do this successfully is missing (Gregg 2008). Yet, lone parents have been asked in the many government commissioned studies about their motivation and timescale for moving into work. A derived version of the survey questions in FACS, which combines their timetable for looking for work with whether their expectation of being in work or not in two year's time, forms the basis of the analysis here (see chapter three for a fuller

description of the derivation of the variable). The aim of the analysis is to establish to what extent lone parents own timescale identifies clear groups and predicts their movement into the labour market. Based on this, conclusions can be drawn as to whether the timescale of lone parents would be a useful basis or addition for any profiling exercise. At this point all lone parents with children under 16, i.e. potentially eligible for Income Support, are included in the analysis. The reason for not taking age of child into account is because it is looking forward, e.g. a lone parent whose youngest child is nine months old may well be planning to be working in two years time.

Starting with an overview of the distribution of lone parents not in employment according to their work anticipation. Table 7.8 shows the distribution of the six groups for 2005. It shows that the distribution across the six groups has remained relatively stable. Therefore, neither a trend towards increased work search as a result of the government's policies and rhetoric supporting work nor a trend in the opposite direction as those left on Income Support have less perceived ability or motivation to move towards work can be discerned. Instead 14 per cent of lone parents were looking for work now, ten per cent were looking within six months to a years time and 20 per cent looking in a year or two years time (all in table 7.8). Those three groups are the focus of the subsequent analysis as they have some plan and timescale to move into employment in the foreseeable future. Together they constitute 44 per cent of all lone parents not in work. The final three groups, those who are planning to look some time and are expecting to be in work as well as those not expect to be in work in two years time and those who are not planning to look, are not included in the subsequent analysis as they are not looking to move into work in the foreseeable future.

**Table 7.8: Work anticipation of lone parents on IS**

	Column %	2005
Looking now and expecting to work		14 (5)
Looking soon and expecting to work		10(3)
Looking in a year or two and expecting to work		20 (7)
Looking some time in the future and expecting to work		12 (4)
Looking some time in the future and not expecting to work		22 (8)
Not looking to work		9 (3)
Other		12 (4)
Total		100
All		622

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

For the remainder of the analysis, only the first three groups are taken forward and will be referred to as '**two years**'. In other words, those who have a clear timescale for both their work search activity and when to expect an employment outcome. If all of lone parents in these three groups moved into employment, the overall employment rate would increase by 15 per cent and thus go up 73 per cent. (table 7.9) This means that in the best case scenarios, the employment target would be exceeded though it would still not be possible to meet the employment rate for the child poverty target.

**Table 7.9: Comparison of different activation scenarios for looking and expecting to be in work in '2 years'**

	In per cent	2 years
<b>Employment increases and the employment target</b>		
Current employment rate of all lone parents		58%
Increase in overall employment rate in best case scenario		+15%
Overall employment rate in best case scenario		73%
<b>Required activation for targets</b>		
Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for employment target scenario		80%
Proportion of target group that would need to move into employment for child poverty target scenario		>100%

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

When looking at the characteristics of this group, then it seems that it still is quite different from those in work. Lone parents looking to search and find work in the next two years are twice as likely to have three or more children than lone parents in work. Similarly, they are three times as likely to either have an impairment themselves or to be looking after a child with an impairment to the extent that it limits the amount or kind of work they can do (table 7.10). They are also less likely to have qualifications, receive maintenance and to not be social tenants (see table 7.10).



**Table 7.10: Comparison of characteristics of lone parents according to work status and work anticipation**

<i>Column %</i>	<b>Work anticipation</b>		
	Working	2 years	All
<b>Number of dep. children</b>			
1 or 2	92	83	87
3+	8	17	13
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single (incl. former cohabitantes)	44	67	54
Other (separated, divorced or widowed)	56	33	46
<b>Health</b>			
Impairment	5	18	16
No impairment	95	82	84
<b>Any qualifications</b>			
No	9	20	18
Yes	91	80	82
<b>Tenure</b>			
Social tenant	28	67	48
Other (mortgage, private tenant or other)	72	34	52
<b>Receives maintenance</b>			
No	56	85	70
Yes	44	15	31
<b>Six years or more on IS or never worked</b>			
Yes	n/a	34	n/a
no	n/a	66	n/a
Weighted base	773	266	1721

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The difference between lone parents in work and those planning to move into work is also apparent when looking at the distribution of multiple disadvantages (shown in table 7.11). While nearly three quarters of lone parents in work do not have any disadvantages, this applies to just under a third of lone parents. Similarly, while eight per cent of lone parents expecting to work have three or more disadvantages, the figure for those in work is too small to show (all in table 7.11).

**Table 7.11: Number of disadvantages for lone parents by work anticipation**

<i>Column %</i>	<b>Work anticipation</b>		
	In work	2 years	All
<b>Number of disadvantages</b>			
None	73	32	52
One	23	39	28
Two	3	21	13
Three or more	*	8	7
All	100	100	100
Weighted Base	773	266	1625

\* fewer than 10 respondents

Source: FACS 2005, own analysis: all lone parents whose youngest child is under 16 on IS. The data is weighted using ggrossw. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

## **7.4 Summary**

A range of policy models for targeting lone parents into employment have been applied in this chapter. The approaches examined in this chapter were the transition approach, the Wisconsin works approach and finally, using self-defined distance to work as one part of any profiling of lone parents. In each case, firstly, the impact on the overall employment rate of lone parents, if all those in the target groups were to move into employment, was assessed. Next, the target group, with regards to each approach, was compared with their counterparts in work, according to the characteristics linked to

employment/non-employment and finally, a variation of the index of multiple disadvantages (Berthoud 2003) was applied to each approach.

Table 7.12 shows a summary of these comparisons, i.e. the employment rates, impact on the target groups and the effects of varying numbers of disadvantages on these groups projected outcomes. The impact on the employment target differs substantially between the groups, a factor of their size and current employment rate. Unsurprisingly, those policies that target a larger group of lone parents, in general, by lowering the age of child regarding exemptions, potentially have a bigger impact on meeting the target, than those with a higher age cut off points. If all lone parents in the respective target groups were to move into work, the employment target would be met in all three scenarios. While the employment rate required to meet the child poverty target through lone parent employment would be missed by all approaches, the best case scenario in the transition approach would at least meet the 80 per cent overall employment goal in Britain (see table 7.12).

However, when looking at the distribution of disadvantages, the Wisconsin Works model stands out. Here, 55 per cent of lone parents in the target group do not have any disadvantages and should therefore be more likely to move into the labour market. As discussed above, the Wisconsin Works model does activate lone parents when their children are very young, which is controversial, and the debate about the impact of maternal employment, whilst children are still very young, is ongoing. However, the notion of targeting according to employability criteria, essentially profiling lone parents not in work, is likely to mean that lone parents in the labour market group based on the voluntary approach are indeed more likely to find a job than those in the other target groups and thus assist the achievement of the stated aim of the reform, that is to move lone parents into employment and out of poverty.

**Table 7.12: Comparison of employment rates, potential impact on the employment target and the number of disadvantages of the respective target groups**

	<b>Current overall employment rate of respective groups</b>	<b>100% of this group in employment</b>	<b>% to enter employment to meet employment target</b>	<b>% with no disadvantages</b>	<b>% with three or more disadvantages</b>
<b>Older children</b>	68	+13	92	15	26
<b>Younger and older children</b>	62	+23	+52	29	22
<b>Transition</b>	58	+22	+55	18	23
<b>W2</b>	48	+18	+66	49	*
<b>Work anticipation</b>	n/a	+15%	80	32	8

## **CHAPTER 8: Discussion and conclusions**

The current welfare-to-work reform requiring lone parents with older children to be available for work is a radical and controversial departure from previous policy. The aims of the reform are to meet the employment target for lone parents of 70 per cent by 2010 and beyond as a key policy lever to meet the ambitious child poverty targets for 2010 and 2020. At the same time, the respective Labour governments have highlighted the need for evidence-based policy and commissioned a range of studies on lone parents and non-employment. Therefore, as stated in the introduction the aim and rationale of this thesis has been to carry out an evidence-based-policy-appraisal of age of child as a criterion for activation within the current welfare-to-work reform to establish how well it is likely to perform against the objectives and whether alternative policy approaches would perform better.

The research questions for the thesis have been:

1. What is the evidence base on non-employment of lone parent and how useful is the evidence base for carrying out an evidence-based appraisal of the reform?
2. How well is the age of child selection criterion likely to work and for whom?
3. Are there alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation by the age of their youngest child and if so, how well are would these work in the British context?

In this chapter the key findings are going to be discussed in light of those research questions (section 8.1), followed by the policy implications (section 8.2), reflections on carrying out an evidence-based appraisal (section 8.3) and discussions of future directions for this research (section 8.4).

### ***8.1 Discussion of key findings***

Starting with the first research question on the evidence base around lone parents and non-employment: As discussed in chapter three, the respective governments have commissioned a vast amount of research on lone parents generally and lone parents and non-employment in particular. This body of research has tended to look at four aspects linked to non-employment: characteristics, barriers, work orientation and distance to work. The available research has built up a consistent picture with regards to the characteristics associated with non-employment. The age of the youngest child

according to this is one of several characteristics associated with non-employment. Other characteristics include the labour market history and qualifications of the lone parent, levels of ill health in the family and other characteristics such as maintenance receipt and tenure. However, analysis based on characteristics is necessarily descriptive. Furthermore, the reason behind the association with non-employment of some characteristics such as being a social tenant is not clear, i.e. whether the driving force behind its link with non-employment is based on the local area or benefit administration for example. The government sponsored research on lone parents has established that the main barrier to employment for lone parents is the lack of affordable childcare. However, beyond this initial barrier, there is less certainty over the ranking of other barriers such as ill-health, lack of confidence or an absence of jobs in the area. Moreover, it is not clear how the barriers relate to each other nor their persistence when moving into work and what role other factors such as social capital and the behaviour and views of friends and family are playing for different groups of lone parents in the decision whether to move into employment or not. Some of these aspects have been addressed in the latest two waves of FACS (Collins et al 2006). However, the data is not yet available even though the official reports of both years have been published. Therefore, it has not been possible to include these new questions in this analysis.

With regards to the 'distance to work' concept it seems that when splitting lone parents into three groups according to their own timescale to move into work both the 'work ready' and the 'never work' group are relatively homogenous and that the labour market behaviour can be predicted for those two groups to be in line with their plans (Kasparova et al 2004). The problem though comes when looking more closely at the 'work postpone' group which is by far the most substantial of the three. However, it is also the most heterogeneous and the timing of movements into work from this group vary considerably. Therefore, I have further sub-divided this group by the responses to the questions regarding the timescale for work search and the expectation of being in work in two years. The new group of lone parents who are planning to look for and expect to be in work within the next two years captures a more coherent group who is also less likely to have multiple disadvantages than those with longer or less defined timescales for moving into work. This suggests that work anticipation would be a useful factor to include in the profiling planned in the context of the suggestions in the Welfare Reform Bill.

The shortcomings of government-sponsored research around barriers and distance to work are caused by two main problems. The majority of this research has been under-theorised and subsequent studies have duplicated previous questions and areas of interest. This trend to duplicate rather than complement previous questionnaires and themes for analysis has resulted in only a few questions about each factor associated with non-employment being included in each survey. This has meant that none of the surveys have explored one or several topics in more detail but also, due to the differences in question wording, that the data is not even comparable over time. To address these shortcomings, would mean revisiting the way research is being commissioned by government in terms of the timescales and the availability of experts in both research methodology and the subject area, e.g. through core funded research centres.

The lack of understanding around barriers and distance to work means that the policy appraisal was based on a comparison of characteristics between the target group on IS and their equivalent in work. It has therefore been limited to evaluating for whom the selection based on the age of the youngest child is working without being able to shed light particularly on the why. In this thesis then, the existing evidence has been assessed in terms of its usefulness for policy appraisals and the subsequent analysis has drawn on the broader debates around the causes of non-employment that have not very often been linked to lone parents, namely employability and work orientation. This has formed the basis of the adaptation of the concept of multiple disadvantages by Berthoud (2003). However, picking up on the quote from the White Paper on Modernising Government (1999) in chapter four, not only 'better use of evidence' is needed in terms of this policy appraisal suggesting that age of child is not well suited to identify 'ability to work' but also better evidence.

Moving on to the second research question which has focused on whether selecting lone parents by the age of the youngest child for work activation is likely to have a substantial impact on the employment target of lone parents. As a first step a number of scenarios have been compared such as the best -case scenario where the increase in the employment rate all lone parents is compared between the different approaches if all lone parents in the respective target groups moved into employment. Starting with the target group of the current welfare-to-work reform, namely those lone parents whose youngest child is between seven and 15 years old: Analysis of FACS data suggests that the employment rate would be met if the vast majority of lone parents

were to move into employment. However, this does not seem particularly likely given the relatively high levels of multiple disadvantages among this group.

The steady-state analysis suggests that the employment rate of lone parents with older children would remain relatively stable in a counterfactual scenario as it has not increased over the past four years. While the overall employment rate of lone parents has increased slightly over this period, the increase has mainly taken place among lone parents with very young children. This could mean that the lone parents who are able to move into work easily among those with older children have already done so and that it is therefore more difficult to activate those remaining on benefits. Furthermore, given the contraction in the economy and the predictions for unemployment rising over the next few years, the employment rate of lone parents is likely to decrease if no other measures are being taken. In summary then, the counterfactual scenario would seem to point to the employment rate of lone parents with older children to be staying the same as it is now at best while a more likely scenario given the overall economic climate is that the employment rate of lone parents with older children would decrease.

In any case, the final data analysis of the current welfare-to-work reform is looking at the composition of the target group in order to examine further to what extent lone parents in this group are likely to move into work. Comparing lone parents in the target group to their counterparts in work along key characteristics associated with non-employment suggests that the out of work group is substantially different on many of those indicators such as having three or more children, being a social tenant, having a work limiting disability or impairment. This is in addition to substantial proportions of lone parents in this group not having any qualifications or recent work experience. The importance of the latter has been highlighted in the discussions around employability in the low skilled sector. Moreover, the level of multiple disadvantages is much higher in the target group compared to their counterparts in work suggesting that at least a sub-group of lone parents within the target group is likely to struggle both to move into and stay in work. This also throws into question the government's interpretation of 'ability to work' as lone parents in the group with three or more disadvantages are likely to face challenges both in terms of their own physical ability to work, the absence of childcare and other care services in the case of the impairment of one of their children as well as challenges to compete successfully in the labour market if they have neither qualifications nor recent work experience.



As discussed in the policy chapter, the Welfare Reform Bill going through parliament at the moment is intending to abolish Income Support altogether and therefore abolish the right to receive income replacement benefits for individuals who are not disabled or above pension age. Instead lone parents will be required to participate in work-related activities when their youngest child is three years or older and from seven onwards be available for work. However, one alternative would have been to lower the age of child threshold at which lone parents have to be available for work to three years. This age cut off is in place in several other countries such as Sweden or Denmark.

Including this group in the work activation focus seems promising on a number of accounts. Firstly, the steady-state employment rate of this group has continued to increase over the past four years when that of lone parents with older children has remained stable. This suggests that there is perhaps a bigger pool of lone parents in that group that could move into work more easily than in that of lone parents with older children. This is borne out when looking at the characteristics of that group compared to their counterparts in that group and compared to that of lone parents with older children on Income Support. The group of lone parents with younger children is substantially less likely to have multiple disadvantages than those with older children and are overall more similar to their counterparts in work. Furthermore, as the overall number of lone parents would be increased by including those whose youngest child is between three and six years old, means that the employment target could be reached if only 52 per cent would be successfully activated which seems far more achievable than successful activation rates of over 90 per cent.

In terms of an overall assessment then, selecting lone parents for work activation by age of child starting with lone parents with older children is unlikely to mean the same as selecting by 'ability to work' at this point in time. The employment of lone parents with older children is much higher than that of lone parents with younger and very young children, which does support the suggestion that lone parents with older children are able to work. However, this does mean that it should also be used as a criterion for activation as those lone parents with older children who are still on IS are not very likely to move into employment as indicated by the profile of lone parents in terms of their characteristics and multiple levels of disadvantage. Therefore, selecting lone parents only based on the the age of child is unlikely to be effective in moving the lone parents in this group who remain on IS into work. Instead it is likely to create a group of long-term unemployed lone parents who have been moved to JSA and now face more conditions and sanctions but not necessarily more support. While this thesis has been

concentrating on selection criteria, selection design, i.e. what the activation entails is closely linked to this. Therefore, activating lone parents in the way of the current welfare-to-work reform, namely to move them from an income replacement benefit to a jobsearch benefit from one day to the next based on the age of their child is unlikely to deal effectively with hard-to-reach groups and I would argue that these form a substantial proportion of lone parents with older children left on IS.

More broadly, while age of child is used as a selection criterion in many other countries some of which have high lone parent employment rates and low child poverty rates such as Sweden and Denmark, the design of the policy tends to be embedded and fit with other family policies, such as the parental leave regulations. Looking ahead to the Welfare Reform Bill this does not seem to be envisaged in Britain where the main focus is still on childcare provision rather than more on a broader lifecycle approach recommended in a number of commentators (Millar 2003 and Rafferty and Walker 2003 a and b among others).

The third research question has focused on alternative approaches to selecting lone parents for work activation based on the age of the youngest child. Existing literature on comparing the policy treatment of lone parents in different countries has tended to focus on distinguishing whether lone parents are treated as mothers/ workers/ wives and the financial outcomes of this or whether they have been treated like other families or as a group with particular needs. In other words, existing comparative research has tended to compare lone parents with other groups rather than to distinguish different groups within lone parents. This has mainly been done in national studies and then has tended to focus on benefit eligibility, e.g. based on route into lone parenthood. The approach taken in this thesis, namely to draw out the criteria according to which lone parents are selected for work activation is adding to this body of literature. At the same time it is bridging the literature focused on lone parents with that on activation more generally, which has tended to focus on the long-term unemployed and young people.

Four alternative approaches to defining 'ability to work' and selecting lone parents accordingly have been identified. Of those, it was only possible to map two of those onto FACS data, namely the approach based on transition and that based on profiling by employability. The transition approach, which is in place in France and Norway is based on the notion that lone parents may require income replacement support for a limited period of time while they adjust to being the sole parent and provider. The Norwegian model has been chosen as a case study for this thesis and mapped using

FACS data. The target group, i.e. those lone parents who are not eligible for the transitional benefit, is very similar to the extended target group by age of child. In other words, it includes all lone parents whose child is seven years or older on Income Support and all those whose youngest child is between three and six years old who have not split up with their partner in the past two years which is the majority. Therefore, the numbers in terms of the steady state calculation, potential to reach the various targets, the characteristics and the multiple disadvantages are very similar to that of the group of lone parents examined previously, i.e. those with younger and older children. The main difference between the two approaches is conceptual with the transition approach focusing on the circumstance of the lone parent as well as the needs of the child.

The second approach that has been mapped onto the British context was the Wisconsin works model. This model is one of the best known work activation schemes in the US due to its success as well as its comparatively harsh regime of lifetime limits of social assistance receipt as well as the early cut off point for activation. W2 consists of an employment ladder and individuals are placed on this ladder according to a number of characteristics indicating their ability to compete in the labour market. The size of the 'labour market' group according to this approach is such that the employment target could be achieved if just over half of lone parents in this group were successfully activated, though again, even the best case scenarios would not be enough to meet the employment rate required for the child poverty target.

A comparison of characteristics and disadvantages using this approach is problematic as the selecting into the 'labour market' group is based on characteristics some of which, such as health and qualifications, are included in both approaches. Therefore, the fact that lone parents in the 'labour market' group have much lower levels of multiple disadvantages is part of the design of both the policy approach. However, arguably it is also a reflection of the aim of the policy, which is to select lone parents into the 'labour market' group who are most likely to be able to obtain a job in the labour market.

The notion of 'distance to work' as reported by lone parents in FACS was examined in the final section. The concept of 'distance to work' has featured prominently in much of the research on lone parents not in work (see chapter three) and has also been mentioned as a gap in the Gregg report (2008). Gregg (2008) argues that there is insufficient information currently to carry out such profiling, yet research on lone

parents not in work has consistently suggested that lone parents have their own timescale for moving into work. Therefore, this self-defined distance to work has been taken as both a proxy for the voluntary approach as well as making a contribution to the debate about how to determine distance to work. The group of lone parents who are planning to look for work and expect to move into work within two years time is smaller than the other groups and it would therefore require a near complete activation in order to reach the employment target. However, the distribution of multiple disadvantages does seem to be more favourable in this group than in those where the lone parents do not have a clear plan for when they would like to move into work and particularly those who do not want to move into work at all.

A comparison of the potential of the various approaches to meet the employment target and the likelihood to do so, presents the following picture: Three of the five models examined would be sufficient to meet the employment target if the between half and two thirds of lone parents in the respective target groups were successfully activated. Taking three years as the age cut off point arguably is likely to work better than the current cut off point at seven in this sense as it does not require near complete activation, mainly because the group of lone parents required to look for work is bigger than in the other two models. Overall the analysis suggests that age of child is less likely to identify lone parents who are 'able to work' in terms of likely to obtain employment than particularly the employability or work-anticipation-based selections. The selection of lone parents by age of the youngest child has a certain logic to it in terms of the current high employment rates of lone parents with older children compared to those with young children, the administrative ease and the link with childcare provision. However, as indicated at the beginning it does not take into account other relevant characteristics determining employability nor the work orientation of lone parents. Furthermore, the design in the current welfare-to-work reform does not include a stepwise or profile-based programme addressing those hardest-to-reach. The Welfare Reform Bill going through parliament in summer 2009 is suggesting a step-wise approach similar to that of Australia while approaches such as Wisconsin Works tend to place lone parents in different programmes according to their chances of getting a job almost irrespective of the age of their youngest child.

Given that age of child does not seem to be a particularly good indicator of 'ability to work' for those lone parents with older children who are on Income Support at the moment, the question about what support is on offer for those who cannot work re-

surfaces and the answer seems to be more stringent job search requirements, a higher risk of sanctions, less freedom to enrol in full-time training and potentially workfare.

## ***8.2 Policy implications***

The age of child model both in current reform and in Welfare Reform Bill seems to be based on the notion that the majority of lone parents become lone parents while their children are very young, that they stay lone parents for a long time and that they stay out of the labour market for the whole of that period. I would argue that the stepwise activation and abolition of IS for lone parents with very young children is meant to have a signalling effect, i.e. while lone parents may not have to look for work at that point, they should be aware that this is temporary reprieve and that the expectation is for them to move into work as soon as their children get older. However, given the high level of multiple disadvantages to employment across lone parents out of work but particularly among those with older children suggests that both the reform and the forthcoming run the danger of effectively creating a new group of long term unemployed.

All of these comments also apply to the Welfare Reform Bill going through parliament at the moment in which the age limit for lone parents would be lowered to the age of three. However, instead of having to be available for work, lone parents with younger children would be required to carry out work-related-activities, such as training, work placements or voluntary work. Unlike the New Deal for Young People though, this work-related-activity is not formally set up by the JobCentre. In other words, the responsibility of finding and arranging the activity rests with the lone parents. This makes the emergence of bigger schemes run by large employers less likely and refers back to the point of investment to make the policy change work for lone parents. It has been argued that the New Deal for Lone Parents stayed voluntary as it had the least to offer and the lowest investment (Evans 2001a). While public money is being spent on enabling lone parents to combine work and parenting in terms of childcare provision and tax credits, it does not seem that such investment is going to extent to the part of getting into work.

If ability to work is meant to mean ability to get a job, then a number of other approaches could be considered, e.g. such as those in the New Deal for Young People or even the notion of work placements as in W2. The employability literature suggests

that having recent work experience in low skilled jobs is a key criterion for being able to obtain jobs. Furthermore, the criteria used for the profiling lone parents according to their ability to compete in the labour market could be used as a basis for any profiling pilots in Britain. Another alternative to selecting lone parents by age of child, which arguably gains weights in the current economic climate and the resulting limits on public expenditure, would be the 'do nothing' option or on increased focus on retention and advancement. This would also chime with lone parents own plans and aspirations as it would focus resources on those who have already made the transitions to employment rather than defining on the basis of the age of their child who is required to look for work. In other words it would support the choice of lone parents and it has been suggested that bringing the employment exit rate down to the average exit rate would be sufficient to meet the employment target (Evans et al 2003). Focusing on employment retention would seem a sensible and realistic alternative to work activation particularly at a time of economic crisis and therefore worth exploring in future research.

### ***8.3 Future directions for this research***

In terms of future directions for this research, I would propose four main avenues. The first could potentially be accommodated in the publications coming out of this thesis, namely, to replicate the cross-sectional analysis using data from the Labour Force Survey. The advantages of this are the bigger sample of lone parents and that the analysis would be based on the same data source as that of the government. Complementary to this, carrying out longitudinal modelling to examine movements into work of the different target groups could be carried out using FACS. The third avenue is to carry out an extrinsic evaluation. In this thesis the objectives of the government have been adopted. However, it could be argued that for an increase in the employment rate to contribute to a lowering of the child poverty rate, this employment would need to be sustained and contain opportunities for progression where lone parents have entered the labour market at jobs on National Minimum Wage. The final avenue is more ambitious and builds on the comparison of selection approaches. In line with the overall argument made in this thesis that lone parents are now treated as (male) workers a logical extension of this research would be to compare activation mechanisms of lone parents in different countries in terms of their effectiveness in getting lone parents into employment. The relevant dimensions for such a comparison would be, for example, whether work-related activity is linked to the age of child as in

the Welfare Reform Bill, in Australia or the Norwegian model or whether it is linked to the employability of lone parents as in W2. Another dimension is the administration of the work activation, i.e. is this delivered by a mix of service providers who are delivering to a mix of clients or only lone parents? Linked to this is the possibility of identifying different ways of profiling individuals not in work applied to other groups such as the unemployed and disabled people both in this and other countries to lone parents.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would argue that the appraisal of the selection criterion of the current welfare-to-work reform has been successful in evaluating the different approaches against the reform objectives stated by the government despite the gaps in the evidence base. Selecting by age of child without any support measures for those who are not able to work is more likely to lead to further hardship for those lone parent families than a substantial rise in the overall employment rate and therefore does not seem to be the sensible suggestion it once was. Even then there is a general argument to be made that the 'age of child' is a crude indicator for 'ability to work' and that tailored profiling such as in place in Wisconsin or including lone parents' work anticipation is likely to be an improvement over 'age of child' in identifying lone parents that are able to work and those that may need further support. More research is needed to develop better profiling procedures to identify 'ability to work' interpreted as 'ability to compete in the labour market'. In the meantime, given the economic situation focusing on job retention could be a better use of the famous marginal pound, not least because it has the potential of taking into account the wider circumstances of lone parent families rather than conceptualising them as an extension of their children. However, alongside the focus on paid work, more attention and resources are needed for those likely to stay out of work in order to avoid continued social exclusion of those families.

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### **General points about the preparation of datasets using FACS**

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the interpretation of the end product of FACS has changed from wave four, i.e. 2002, onwards. For the first three waves, the research reports were regarded as the main products and they contained in-depth analysis. However, the data sets themselves were seen as less important. From 2002 onwards, the view of what the end product was changed to it including the data set, a regular report containing the main figures and especially commissioned in-depth analysis of FACS focusing on particular topics. In addition, children were now also interviewed and all the data on children comes in a separate file to the data on lone parents.

Therefore, the first step is to merge the two data files for each year, i.e. containing the child or the family data. This has been done for each of the four survey waves using the unique serial number as the key matching variable.

### **2005 FACS data – wave 7**

The official analysis of the 2005 FACS data has been published in research report number 424 (Hoxhallari et al 2007) by the Department for Work and Pensions. The numbers are reported without weighting while the proportions have been weighted using the cross-sectional grossing survey weight. Starting with the unweighted numbers then, the original data file contains 2127 lone parents. However, of those, only 1910 have dependent children according to the child benefit definition. In other words, dependent child for child benefit eligibility purposes is defined as being either under 16 years or between 16 and 18 and in full-time education. This figure, i.e. 1910 lone parents with dependent children, is the same in my analysis as in the published data (Hoxhallari 2007, p. 21 onwards, table 2.1). I have carried out further analysis comparing the numbers between my data set and the published figures and they were identical. A selection of this analysis is presented in table A1 below.

Table A1: Comparison between unweighted 2005 FACS numbers in published report and my own analysis

Unweighted numbers	My analysis	DWP report no 206
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	81	81
Female	1829	1829
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	965	965
Working 0-15 hours	945	945
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	1069	1069
2	593	593
3	179	179
4 or more	69	69
<b>Total</b>	1910	1910

Source: Own analysis and Hoxhallari et al. (2007), p. 21 onwards, table 2.1.

I am using weighting for my analysis in order to compensate for any non-response bias, i.e. to ensure that the survey sample is representative for the population of families with children living in Britain. The organization in charge of the data collection, namely the National Centre for Social Research, have developed both cross-sectional and longitudinal weights for the dataset and these are provided with the dataset available from the National Data Archive.

For the steady state analysis I am comparing the employment rates for the respective survey waves. In other words I am carrying out cross-sectional analysis and will therefore use one of the cross-sectional weights provided. The recommendation in the technical reports accompanying the different waves of FACS is to use the grossing weights for cross-sectional analysis (see Lyon et al 2007 among others). There are two grossing weights in the dataset,. The first grossing weight: grossp, brings the collected data up to the population numbers and the second (grossw) to the survey numbers. In other words, while the overall number using grossp is 1.7 million for 2002, the total number of lone parents using grossw is 1867. In other words, the second weight

presents the data as an estimation of the numbers of respondents in the different groups, such as lone parents, as if there had not been any bias in the data collection. The other weight also makes this assumption but then multiplies the numbers in order to align them with the actual figures of different groups living in Britain. As described in more detail in the technical reports for each survey wave, the grossing weights are aligning the survey proportions with that of the all families based on the following distributions:

1. Age distribution of Child Benefit recipients.
2. Number of dependent children.
3. Government Office Region.
4. Number/proportion of tax credit recipients.
5. Proportion of lone parents.

These distributions were derived from administrative data such as the child benefit recipient data base as well as work by the Office for National Statistics on the number of lone parent families (see Philips et al 2003).

Table A2: Comparing the effect of weighting on proportions within 2005 FACS data between published figures and my own analysis

	Weighted data	Unweighted data
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	5	4
Female	95	96
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	53	52
Working 0-15 hours	47	48
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	56	55
2	31	30
3	9	11
4 or more	4	4
<b>Total</b>	1884	1911

Source: Own analysis, weighting ggrossw.

For this analysis I am using the grossing weight to gross the data up to survey numbers (dxgrssw) in order to be able to check the cell sizes. As shown in table A2, the percentages match between my ata set and the published data.

## 2004 FACS data – wave 6

The official analysis of the 2003 FACS data has been published in research report number 340 (Lyon et al 2006) by the Department for Work and Pensions. In this report, the numbers are reported unweighted while the proportions are weighted (see Lyon et al 2006, p. 15-16). The original data file contains 2107 lone parents. However, of those 166 have not got dependent children as defined by child benefit regulations. Therefore, the number in the data file of lone parents with dependent children is 1941. This is the same as in Lyon et al. (2006, p.21 onwards, table 2.1). I have run checks on key variables and found that they were identical with the published data. Table A3 shows a



selection of characteristics from my analysis and the published figures.

Table A3: Comparison between unweighted 2004 FACS numbers in published report and my own analysis

Unweighted numbers	My analysis	DWP report no 206
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	88	88
Female	1855	1855
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	970	970
Working 0-15 hours	971	971
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	1035	1035
2	638	638
3	199	199
4 or more	69	69
<b>Total</b>	1941	1941

Source: Own analysis and Lyon et al. (2006), p. 21 onwards, table 2.1.

As discussed for the 2005 data, I am using the survey grossing weight supplied with the dataset. Table 4 shows the differences between the weighted and the unweighted dataset for some of the key variables.

Table A4: Comparing the effect of weighting on proportions within 2004 FACS data between published figures and my own analysis

	Unweighted data	DWP report no 340 - weighted
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	4	4
Female	96	96
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	50	48
Working 0-15 hours	50	52
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	53	55
2	33	31
3	10	10
4 or more	4	3
<b>Total</b>	1941	1941

Source: Own analysis and Lyon et al (2006), table 2.1, page 21 onwards, weighting fgrossw.

For this analysis I am using the grossing weight to gross the data up to survey numbers (fgrossw) in order to be able to check the cell sizes. As shown in table A2, the percentages match between my data set and the published data.

### 2003 FACS data – wave 5

The official analysis of the 2003 FACS data has been published in research report number 250 (Barnes et al 2005) by the Department for Work and Pensions. The original data file contains 2226 lone parents. However, of those 146 do not have dependent children any longer and therefore do not fall within the definition of lone parent used in this thesis, namely that they should have dependent children. After taking out lone parents without dependent children and those that are retired (two lone parents), the overall sample size is 2060 in both my analysis and the report by Barnes et al (2005). I have compared the breakdown along key characteristics between my

data and the published tables and an extract is presented in table A5 below. The figures are reported without weighting in the official FACS report (Barnes et al. 2005), so I have matched the unweighted numbers in my dataset with that in the report for key variables and found that they were identical.

Table A5: Comparison between unweighted 2003 FACS numbers in published report and my own analysis

Unweighted numbers	My analysis	DWP report no 250
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	83	83
Female	1977	1977
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	961	961
Working 0-15 hours	1099	1099
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	1073	1073
2	661	661
3	245	245
4 or more	81	81
<b>Total</b>	2062	2062

Source: Own analysis and Barnes et al. (2004), p. 29 onwards, table 2.1.

As for the other survey waves, I am using the cross-sectional weight (egrossw) provided with the data set in order to gross up the numbers to the overall survey figures. Again, the numbers and proportions in my analysis match that in the official report. The unweighted number of all lone parents with dependent children was 2060 but goes down to 1817 after applying the weight. As in the other survey waves, applying the weight does not substantially change the proportions for the key variables (see table A6).

Table A6: Comparing the effect of weighting on proportions within 2003 FACS data

between unweighted and weighted data

	Weighted data	Unweighted data
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	4	4
Female	96	96
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	48	47
Working 0-15 hours	52	53
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	55	52
2	30	32
3	11	12
4 or more	4	4
<b>Total</b>	1817	2062

Source: Own analysis and Barnes et al (2005), p. 29 onwards, table 2.1, weighting egrossws.

The final step in the data checking is to take out those lone parents who report that they are lone parents but also that they are married and living with a partner for the reasons described above. In the 2003 wave, eleven lone parents in the unweighted file claim to be both married and living with a partner and have therefore been taken out. Therefore, the overall number of lone parents in the unweighted file changes from 2060 to 2049 while in the weighted file it changes from 1817 to 1803. Therefore, the base number for lone parents with dependent children for the analysis of 2003 data in this thesis after data cleaning and weighting is 1803.

#### **FACS 2002 data – wave 4**

The official analysis of the 2002 FACS data has been published in research report number 206 (Barnes et al 2004) by the Department for Work and Pensions. I have compared my analysis of the dataset with that in the report for key variables and found

that they were identical starting from the overall number of lone parents with dependent children being 2146 in both files. A comparison of key variables is shown in table A7 below.

Table A7: Comparison between 2002 unweighted FACS numbers in published report and my own analysis

Unweighted numbers	My analysis	DWP report no 206
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	94	94
Female	2052	2052
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	973	973
Working 0-15 hours	1173	1173
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	1105	1105
2	693	693
3	264	264
4 or more	84	84
<b>Total</b>	2146	2146

Source: Own analysis and Barnes et al. (2004), p. 23, table 2.1.

Prior to weighting the data, I have taken out those lone parents who are retired and those who report that they are married and living with a partner. Of the 2146 lone parents with dependent children then, 15 lone parents are either retired or married nad living with their partner. They have therefore been taken out of the sample, which means that the unweighted sample contains 2131 lone parents.

For this analysis I am using the grossing weight to gross the data up to survey numbers (dgrossw) as for the other years. Instead of 2146 lone parents with dependent children, the sample now contains 1838 lone parents and after taking out the group mentioned above, 1823 lone parents. The latter is the base number for the analysis of 2002 data in this thesis. As shown in table A8, the percentages match between my data set and the published data.

Table A8: Comparing the effect of weighting on proportions within 2002 FACS data between published figures and my own analysis

	Weighted data	DWP report no 206 - unweighted
<b>Gender of lone parents</b>		
Male	4	4
Female	96	96
<b>Work status</b>		
Working 16+ hours	48	45
Working 0-15 hours	52	55
<b>Number of children</b>		
1	54	51
2	31	32
3	11	12
4 or more	4	4
<b>Total</b>	1837	2146

Source: Own analysis, weighting dgrossw